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Nato's new cold war

AND THE RESURRECTION OF RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM

IN THIS ISSUE: ISIS • NATO • GAZA • FERGUSON • REVIEWS

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EDITORIAL 3

SURVEYS

Israel’s third war in Gaza and the prospects for Palestinian liberation 7

Counterrevolution in Syria invites US return to Iraq 12

Britain: hot autumn or winter freeze? 19

Ferguson: racist cop murders spark resistance 22

ANALYSIS

Fragile recovery, robust aggression, looming crisis 24

A Populist, not a Communist Manifesto 29

FEATURE

The resurrection of Russian Imperialism 33

REVIEWS

Eleanor Marx:Fighting for working women and trade union rights 49

Silvertown: The lost story of a strike 55

Nato summit lays plans for new cold war

THE DECISION OF the 2014 Nato Summit in Wales to station permanent military forces along the Russian border marks the end of the post-Cold War “phony peace” and the opening of a pre-war period. The rhetoric of impending conflict has taken a step towards real conflict with the creation of a Nato strike force explicitly aimed at countering a supposed threat of a Russian invasion of Eastern Europe.

This bogus threat has been conjured up with an unprecedented barrage of propaganda from western politicians and their tame media. The barrage of lies has focused on an imaginary Russian invasion of Ukraine, and lays the ideological basis for a new period of wars and inter-imperialist conflict.

The potential for real clashes between the rival blocs can be seen all the way from the bombed buildings of Aleppo, in Syria, to those in Donetsk, in Ukraine.

The response of the Nato alliance, determined, as always, by the strategic goals of the United States, is to impose a new Cold War against Russia in Europe and a new round of intervention under the guise of “humanitarianism” in the Middle East.

Devastating as the conflicts in Syria and the Middle East are, they could be overshadowed by a civil war in Ukraine, which would threaten to involve the imperialist powers directly. As we go to press, a ceasefire has been announced but, even if it holds, it is likely only to be a truce that allows the reeling forces of the Kiev regime to regroup.

The strategic importance of Ukraine as the last, constitutionally non-aligned, state between Russia and Nato, has made this the most dangerous conflict in Europe since the opening moves of the First Cold War. The fact that Ukraine’s president, Petro Poroshenko, was the only non-Nato head of state invited to the Summit is an indication of the West’s backing for the Kiev junta.

Nato’s transformation, from an ostensibly “defensive” alliance into an aggressive tool of US foreign policy, started as early as the Balkan wars of the 1990s and was cemented in its still ongoing occupation of Afghanistan. Whatever the rhetoric about “mutual defence”, the decisions of the Nato Summit expose it for a gathering of warmongers.

Peacemakers?

In early September, the German president, Joachim Gauck, told an appreciative Polish audience that Russia’s disregard for the rights of nations “effectively severed its partnership” with Europe. In Brussels, a day or so later, David Cameron likened Putin to Hitler, saying “we run the risk of repeating the mistakes made in Munich in ‘38.”

At the Brussels EU summit, they seem to have worked themselves into a frenzy, led by the self-interested leaders of the Baltic states and Poland, eager to shake down the western Europeans for more arms and supplies. Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė claimed Russia was “at war with Europe”. Right on cue, Angela Merkel said that Estonia and Latvia would be Putin’s next targets.

The Nato Secretary-General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, boasted that Nato’s new 4,000-strong rapid reaction force, agreed at Newport, will “travel light but strike hard”. Moreover, it is only “...what I would call a spearhead”. Not to be outdone, David Cameron proposed a 1914-1939 style 10,000-strong, British-led, joint “expeditionary force”.

Naturally, commitments to rearmament and militarisation of the European border with Russia will not prevent the media casting these wolves in the role of lambs, but this will only deceive those who wish to be deceived.

Unfortunately, the size of the demonstrations outside the Nato summit (1,500 maximum at the weekend and around 500 on the day the summit opened) revealed that this includes the British labour movement and most of the far left.

At the poorly attended “counter-summit”, Counterfire members claimed that the “argument” against imperialist wars has “been won”, this is, frankly, delusional. Our rulers have only had to play the tired old tunes of Russia as the aggressive Bear and Putin as Hitler or Stalin, to have much of the left dancing to their tune whilst others decide to sit this one out.

This journal hopes to make a contribution to warning of the dangers inherent in the present situation and to preparing an anti-imperialist war movement that is not afraid to say, “the main enemy is at home”. Though Putin pursues imperialist objectives in Ukraine and Syria, the main aggressors, pushing forward and threatening a new epoch of wars, are in Washington, London, Paris and Berlin.

The facts are these; Nato is an aggressive, first strike alliance whose dual purpose is to prevent Russia consolidating its own Eurasian imperialist bloc while, at the same time, ensuring that a European Union under German hegemony cannot extricate itself from subordination to the United States.

Should the crimes of the Kiev forces and Nato’s provocations provide Putin with a pretext for a qualitative increase in intervention by the Russian armed forces, effectively an invasion and occupation irrespective of the wishes of the population, we would oppose this and would urge the resistance forces in East Ukraine to give it no support but, on the contrary, to fraternise with Russian troops, urging them either to join and accept the discipline of the resistance bat-

talions or to agitate for their own withdrawal. We remain completely opposed to any annexation of the Eastern regions without the prior, freely expressed, agreement of their people. The wishes of the people of the region are paramount, not the claims of Ukrainian or Russian nationalists. A forcible annexation would simply result in national oppression for all Ukrainian and Russian speakers who wish to be citizens of a democratic Ukraine.

Maidan Left segues into Nato Left.

For much of the far left, the mass media's monolithic unanimity in laying the blame at Putin's feet has, to use a phrase currently fashionable in certain quarters, "hegemonised the narrative" surrounding the conflict.

They repeat the propaganda that Putin is the aggressor and those resisting the attacks of Kiev's storm troopers are "Russian troops" or "pro-Russian separatists". The most shameless dovetailing with bourgeois consensus, and dumping of socialist principle, can be found amongst certain sections of the Fourth International, notably its leadership.

In their schema, the Kiev regime draws its legitimacy from the Maidan movement, which they claim was a popular movement for democracy, an end to corruption and the rule of the oligarchs. As the product of an Occupy/Tahrir Square type movement, they see the present regime as a legitimate expression of Ukraine's struggle for independence and national renaissance.

The AWL is at least frank in its support for western imperialism's champion when it openly proclaims that "socialists should support Ukraine against Russia". This is supported by their rejection of Lenin's theory of imperialism as outmoded and its replacement by a "theory" in which the world is divided into two categories; "big states" and the "little states" that they oppress. From this "analysis" they see the present conflict simply as "big" Russia against "little" Ukraine and draw a simple conclusion. Simple, but wrong. Thank you, we'll stick with Lenin.

Recoiling from the conclusions that flow from such clarity, are the groups that retreat into a comfortable, if imaginary, Third Camp under the slogan neither Washington nor Moscow but International Socialism. This neutrality gives them an excuse for not supporting the antifascist resistance in Ukraine, or naming the aggressors in the civil war raging there, and for not concentrating their fire on Nato and, especially, the United States and Britain, for launching a new Cold War. That is why, despite the gathering of the Cold War mongers in Wales, the British left was still on a political holiday!

The 'Camp of Resistance'

Some of those who are our allies in the defence of the anti-fascist resistance in Ukraine are sharply opposed to us on the question of defence of the beleaguered Syrian resistance to the fascist repression of Bashar al-Assad. This is because they think there are two camps in global politics; one is Imperialism, headed by the US and Nato; the other is what they call, "the Camp of Resistance", headed by Russia and including China, Cuba, Syria, Iran and Venezuela. Many who hold to this approach stem from the Stalinist "family", that is, the former pro-Moscow, pro-Peking, third worldist groups and parties.

Their worldview goes back to the post-1945 Communist Parties. Then, it was the Soviet Union, and the world's Communist Parties, versus the Western Imperialists. Today, most of the political descendants of those parties recognise that Russia and China are capitalist. Only a few deny the obvious and believe that Beijing and/or Moscow are playing a cunning game and making use of capitalism to build socialism, a belief they share with a handful of US right wing conspiracy theorists. Nonetheless, even the majority do not accept the logic of this recognition, that Russia and China, as capitalist "Great Powers", are also imperialist powers. They are indeed "resisting" US imperialism, but certainly not on behalf of the peoples of the world or of peace, democracy and all things bright and beautiful.

The failure to recognise this new reality leads them to minimise the crimes of the totalitarian regimes in Iran and Syria and to pretend that all oppositionists within these states are simply tools of US imperialism. Thus, all the Arab Spring revolutions that erupted against supposedly "anti-imperialist" dictatorships, including Libya as well as Syria, were, from the beginning, both suspect and unwelcome. They express malicious satisfaction at the rise of organisations like ISIS in Syria, or the Islamist militias in Libya, on an "I told you so basis". This, they think, is what comes of rising up against "progressive dictators". Likewise, they are sceptical, at best, and hostile, at worst, towards movements demanding democratic rights in Russia or China.

Of course, the Western imperialists, with the soft power of their bourgeois democratic regimes, their well-funded NGOs and Foundations, allied to their main capitalist parties, do intervene in these countries to foment rebellion and even revolution. Equally, they do intervene to mould, pressure and corrupt genuine revolutions, as do their malevolent allies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. Nonetheless, it is not impossible to tell the difference between a "colour" or "flower"

revolution and genuinely revolutionary upheavals, like those of the Arab Spring.

If socialists and communists do not support revolutions like that in, for example, Syria, is it any wonder that their beleaguered fighters turn first to the apparently friendly and democratic USA and the EU and, when these prove to be broken reeds, are obliged to resort to the funders of reactionary Islamism from the Gulf.

Although the adherents of these unhappy theories; the third campists and the two campists, take opposite sides in the two main conflicts today, Ukraine and Syria, they actually share a common methodology. They condemn, or support, a given struggle according to where they judge its main external support comes from, rather than analysing the movement itself, its goals, and its class basis.

In a world of competing imperialist blocs, it is the height of folly to try to read off the character of a movement by reference to the camp it seeks support from or which supports it. Nor will it be easy to find movements that are pure and independent of all imperialisms, forming a sort of ready-made third camp.

We have to solidarise with all working class and progressive struggles against national oppression, for women's and gay rights, against racism and fascism and, by our support, try to develop and encourage their independence from those great powers who will corrupt and disfigure their struggles and, sooner or later, betray them. That is why we need to say to the resistance fighters in Ukraine and in Syria, "Take their weapons (if you have no choice) but strengthen the democratic roots and leadership of your own movement."

The USA's 'overall strategic concept'

In the few months since the previous issue of Fifth International, we have seen a dramatic confirmation of the developments to which we drew attention; the sharpening inter-imperialist rivalry between the US-led Nato bloc and Russia and its few allies. It has progressed from a war of words, through economic sanctions, to the forward deployment of troops in Eastern Europe, with threats to use these forces.

Against a background of the continuing tremors of the 2008 economic crisis, the expansion of Nato has reached its intended conclusion; open military confrontation on the borders with Russia. This situation now has all the hallmarks of a new Cold War, whether or not the cease-fire holds and there is disengagement in Eastern Ukraine. All the pretexts have been put in place for justifying the remorseless isolation of Russia. The US



Ukraine's Poroshenko meets his allies at the Nato Summit in Newport

and its Nato allies are laying the explosive charges of a new world conflagration. The detonation of these charges, once laid, cannot be controlled or foreseen by any one imperialist power or bloc.

What we are seeing is the development of a pre-war period in Europe more dangerous than the 40 year Nato versus Warsaw Pact standoff. It is beyond irony that our rulers should embark on this strategy as they mark the centenary of the First World War. That first imperialist war marked the culmination of a period as important for working class strategy and tactics as the long recession and grinding stagnation which global capitalism entered in 2007-08.

Rearmament, increased military spending, more proxy wars between clients of the major imperialist blocs in Europe, as well as in the Middle and Far East, open the prospect, ultimately, of a military clash/war between the major imperialist powers, even if this is avoided in Ukraine. Giving promises of intervention, under Article 5 of Nato's charter, to highly unstable states, where Russophobia is a keystone national ideology and where extreme rightists, if not fascists, can come to power, is playing with fire.

The aims of US and British imperialism and their European Allies (some of them in an alliance of the unwilling!) are threefold:

- Preventing the resurgence of Russia in a Eurasian geopolitical bloc
- Preventing a German-led EU establishing itself as a rival to the USA
- Preventing the rise of China as a world power.

This requires economic, political and military measures to contain and control the US's rivals.

The economic measures are spearheaded today by the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) which is itself to be supplemented by a Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal with twelve countries including Japan, South Korea and Malaysia. The TTIP contains an Investor State Dispute Settlement, ISDS, that would enable US corporations and finance houses to override national states, and the EU, in the name of free trade. The whole project is aimed at a further wave of neoliberal destruction of the weakened European model of regulation, human and environmental protective legislation and welfarism.

The political measures are designed to prevent the German-led creation of a European super state. The US and Britain (Washington's Trojan Horse within the European project) promoted the entry of as many East European states into the EU as possible as a counterweight to German and French hegemony. The Anglo-Saxon aim is to "reform" the EU by weakening its central institutions, whilst pushing harder for anti-social/pro-liberalisation measures.

The third, military, dimension is a renewed forward thrust by Nato into the Black Sea and Caucasus region, creating the conditions for a series of standoffs with Russia that will be the excuse for restoring pre-1990 US military hegemony over the continent and, therefore, the ability to police its economic hegemony.

Political methodology in the new period

There is no need for the left to invent an entire new strategy for this new period for the simple reason that, in a historic sense, it is not new at all. For over a hundred years, we have had to face the same enemy; imperialism or, as Lenin described it, "capitalism in the epoch of its decline ... parasitic or decaying capitalism". We should also remember his observation in *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* (1916) that "Political reaction all along the line is a characteristic feature of imperialism".

The disappearance of the bureaucratically degenerated workers' states, especially the Soviet Union and China, and their replacement by Russian and Chinese imperialism, whilst a historic defeat for the workers and poor of the world, nevertheless virtually restores the conditions that Lenin faced in the early 20th century.

Once again, several imperialist great powers confront one another. They organise blocs and alliances whose final shape and composition are not yet clear, but the deadly threat they pose to the working class and oppressed nations is clear enough.

We believe that Lenin's analysis and the corresponding tactics to be applied to imperialist powers, to countries they control (if no longer by direct occupation as colonies as in Lenin's day) and to uprisings against either the imperialist powers or the dictatorial regimes in the subordinated capitalist states, can serve revolutionaries as a guide to action

today.

Firstly, Lenin held (as even the Second International recognised in 1907) that all wars between the capitalist great powers would be imperialist wars, not wars of national defence. Whatever the pretexts, they would be wars to seize the markets and assets of rivals or to defend the plunder already accumulated; wars between the lean and hungry robbers and the fat and over stuffed ones. Today, Russia and China represent the former and North America and Western Europe the latter.

In such wars, the working class must desire the defeat of both sides. "The main enemy is in our own land"; defeat is a lesser evil than victory.

Basing revolutionary policy on making a distinction between aggressors and victims of aggression between these states leads straight to social chauvinism and social imperialism.

However, except where it is an element within a more general inter-imperialist conflict, any attack by an imperialist state on a state which is not imperialist requires socialists in both to do all in their power to support the resistance to that attack and aid the defeat of the imperialist power.

Equally, in Lenin's methodology, during an imperialist war, defence of the smaller imperialist powers, which were allies of one or other imperialist bloc headed by the main combatants was not justified because these states were, for all intents and purposes, outliers of the main blocks, pawns in their game.

Nevertheless, he resisted the argument by Bolsheviks like Bukharin and Pyatakov that all struggles by oppressed or colonised peoples against their imperialist masters could simply be reduced to the clash of imperialisms. (An argument that Alex Callinicos makes today in relation to Ukraine) Their rebellions and uprisings, like that of the Irish in 1916, were, in Lenin's judgment, totally justified and to be supported in all possible ways. It was equally justified for them to take aid from their own oppressors' enemies. Of course, they should do all they all they could to avoid immediate domination by such "allies". How does Lenin's method help us today? We are in a situation before any direct clashes between the imperialist powers (how long this may last is impossible to say) but one in which the imperialist powers are tolerating clashes between various surrogates and fomenting bogus revolutions within their opponents' states or amongst their allies.

The principled Leninist approach is to support the class struggle, to support genuine struggles for democracy (as in Syria) and to distinguish them from bogus ones (like the Maidan coup); that is, to support the struggle whose victory would be progressive from the standpoint of the international working class, in every state and country. The USA-EU-Nato do not represent democracy or human rights, just as Russia and its allies, like the butcher Assad, Iran or China, do not represent anti-imperialism.

A revolutionary position therefore requires:

- Support for the Syrian resistance against the murderous Assad regime whilst urging distrust and independence from western imperialism or its regional allies.
- Support for the antifascist resistance in Ukraine whilst urging complete political independence from Russia and the rejection of Russian nationalism and fascism quite as much as Ukrainian nationalism and fascism.
- In the Russian and Chinese proto-bloc, and in the Western Alliance "the main enemy is at home". We need to create a powerful movement warning of the mounting war danger, identifying the fire raisers who would plunge the world into a disastrous war where the very future of humanity is in question.

- Wage the class struggle against neoliberalism in all its aspects, but in all of them show that the only solution is the outright liquidation of capitalism itself, not just neoliberalism.
- Create parties in every country, combined into a Fifth International, fighting against economic immiseration, social degradation, environmental catastrophe and world war and for a worldwide socialist revolution.

Dave Stockton, London, September 2014

Israel's third war in Gaza and the prospects for Palestinian liberation

Israel's onslaught on Gaza saw record numbers demand an end to the siege.

Marcus Halaby asks how can we break the blockade and end the occupation of Palestine

AS OF THE 26 AUGUST ceasefire, over 2,100 Palestinians have been killed since Israel began its wholesale bombing of Gaza on 8 July. Four-fifths of them are non-combatants, amongst them about 500 children.

At least five were killed in a direct attack on al-Aqsa Hospital on 21 July. The killing of 15 people in the Ashraf al-Qidra school on 3 August, in which 200 others were injured, shocked the world. But this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Israel and Hamas agreed to a 12-hour "humanitarian ceasefire" on 25 July, but Israel made it clear that it intended to resume its attack to give the IDF more time to carve out a buffer zone inside Gaza along its border with Israel. Even before this, on 10 July, the IDF warned the 100,000 inhabitants of Beit Lahia, Beit Hanoun and Abasan al-Saghira to evacuate their townships and flee to the west or south of the Gaza strip.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, at least 117,000 Gaza inhabitants (more than one in 20 of the total population) had been forced from their homes by 22 July, many of them taking shelter in UN schools like Ashraf al-Qidra.

Ninety schools and 18 health facilities were damaged, 2,655 housing units were rendered uninhabitable and another 3,175 housing units were damaged. Some 1.2 million people, around two-thirds of the population, have no or very limited access to water or sanitation, while 80 per cent of people only receive four hours of electricity per day.

Even after the ceasefire agreement it is plain that Israel not only has no intention of being bound by any agreement to a permanent cessation of its attacks, but also that it will put an end neither to the stranglehold that its blockade puts on the people of Gaza, nor the daily obstruction and humiliation that the network of checkpoints put on

everyday life in the West Bank.

A ground invasion

This is the third time in six years that Israel has engaged in such a major and indiscriminate bombardment of the Gaza strip. In 2008-09, in the space of just 22 days, the IDF killed between 1,200 and 1,400 Palestinians. Its bombs demolished tens of thousands of homes and 15 of Gaza's 27 hospitals. After this, a tight blockade did all it could to strangle life in the tiny territory. In November 2012, a further Israeli bombing onslaught saw 105 Palestinians killed, mainly civilians.

At various points in the conflict Israel also threatened also a full-scale ground invasion. Some 40,000 Israel Defence Forces (IDF) personnel were called up and 20,000 deployed into the Gaza border region. IDF spokespersons and government figures announced that their objective this time would be to wipe out Hamas for good.

This stated objective is simply unachievable without enormous loss of life, a genocidal act that would once again confirm the ineradicably racist character of the Zionist settler state.

To aid the Israelis, Egypt's fraudulently "elected" military dictator Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has kept the Rafah border crossing firmly closed, and similarly colluded with Israel by closing the tunnels through which supplies and weapons reach Gaza's defenders. Trying his best to wipe out the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Sisi would be quite happy to see the Israelis liquidate Hamas so long as he can deny responsibility and repress any mass expressions of solidarity with the Palestinians at home.

Indifferent world leaders and their furious people

This massive collective punishment would if carried out by any other state attract the most violent (if also hypocritical) condemnation. But because Israel is protected by

the United States and by most of its European allies, it would be futile even to summon the UN Security Council into session. The USA would veto even the slightest criticism of Israel, let alone any mandate for sanctions against it.

Nevertheless the great majority of ordinary people around the world are horrified at what is happening in Gaza, and furious with smug hypocrites, like John Kerry, Barack Obama and David Cameron, who while claiming to represent world opinion continue to excuse and justify Israel's crimes and its long term struggle to destroy the Palestinian people and drive them out of their historic homeland.

Even when "world leaders" condemn Israel's actions, the third such bombardment in six years, or indeed the blockade of Gaza, the Apartheid Wall, the myriad checkpoints or the continued expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank, they still do little or nothing to back their words up with deeds.

The demonstrations that took place in late July and early August in London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Istanbul, Sydney, Washington DC and many other cities indicate the enormous support that the Palestinian cause has across the world. And they have mobilised not just out of sympathy for other people's suffering, but also out of admiration for their resistance and in order to support their struggle.

The working class and anti-imperialist movement worldwide must unite, as it did in 2009, to condemn this savagery, to demand its immediate and permanent cessation and in particular, to demand that our rulers break their complicity with Israel, the key factor that enables the Zionist state to repeat its atrocities time and again with total impunity.

The propaganda war

As before, the Western media, even those parts of it that cannot totally ignore the horrors being visited on Palestinian civilians, repeat the Israeli and American narrative of self-justification. Hamas is a "terrorist organisation", pledged to the destruction of Israel, which rules over Gaza and fires rockets from it into Israel.

"Hiding behind civilians", it uses the population as a "human shield", forcing Israel's army, the most moral and humane in the world, to kill unarmed and defenceless civilians. However, since the IDF thoughtfully sends these civilians text messages telling them to evacuate their homes just before the bombs hit, their deaths while regrettable are nonetheless Hamas's responsibility, or maybe their own.

None of these well-rehearsed and pre-packaged justifications for Israel's actions stand up to any scrutiny, but the charge of "hiding behind civilians" is the flimsiest and most bizarre of all.

In the first instance, Gaza, with a total area of just 365 square kilometres, about the size of the Isle of Wight, within which 1.8 million people are crammed, is one of the most densely inhabited places on earth; there is almost nowhere in Gaza that civilians are not present.

A little more effective in confusing public opinion around the world is the accusation that Hamas is an avatar of "Islamic terrorism". But the fact is that Hamas, as a movement with tens of thousands of cadres, possessing a bureaucracy responsible for disbursing aid and services to almost 2 million people, is quite as inextricable from the host population from which it is recruited and from which it draws its support as any mass political party in the West – or, for that matter, in Israel. Indeed, its roots are far deeper, since it is seen as an expression of the legitimate resistance to Israeli persecution.

Even if this charge, of "hiding behind civilians", were restricted to Hamas's armed formations, it is plain nonsense when set against the pervasive and visible presence of Israel's own conscript army in day-to-day Israeli life.

The Palestinians, so this narrative concludes, are to have no choice but to accept a unilateral ceasefire on Israel's terms – one that they will not be allowed to play any direct role in negotiating, and any inevitable breaches of which will be the pretext for further bombardment and a ground invasion.

So brazen and cynical are these excuses that they refute themselves to millions of people worldwide. But these millions do not provide the billions of dollars in aid and trade that sustain the racist settler state. A handful of key Western imperialist states do, propping up Israel with loan guarantees and military assistance and supplying it with their high-tech weaponry.

Israel's pretext

Israel sought a pretext for their latest offensive on Gaza in the killing in mid-June of three teenage boys from the Gush Etzion settlement bloc in the southern West Bank by their Palestinian kidnappers.

An almost three week long search, during which Israel arrested and mistreated over 600 Palestinians, including many former prisoners that had been released following a previous ceasefire agreement, led to the discovery of the bodies of the three settler youths on 30 June.

The evidence however is that the Israeli authorities already knew of their deaths shortly after their disappearance on 12 June and tried to suppress this knowledge while the search was ongoing, using it as cover for making politically motivated arrests without any connection to their kidnapping.

On 1 July, as their funerals were taking place, Israel struck at 34 locations in the Gaza strip, breaching a ceasefire that had

held since the last major Israeli operation in 2012. Within the first nine days of this assault, the Israeli air force had by its own admission dropped 400 tonnes of explosives, according to a statement by Britain's Unite trade union.

The day after that, on 2 July, the world awoke to the news of the revenge kidnapping and murder in East Jerusalem of 16-year-old Palestinian boy Mohammed Abu Khdeir, who had been beaten and then killed by being set on fire.

A West Bank settler had struck 9-year-old Sanabel Al-Tous with his car the previous day, leaving her lying on the ground with multiple fractures. In Haifa an Israeli driver ran over 55-year-old Anwar Satel from Jaffa, and 44-year-old Zahi Abu Hamed from Qalqilya in the West Bank on 6 July. Numerous other assaults and kidnapping attempts were also reported across the country.

Racist vigilante activity of this sort is increasingly common, with 200 attacks by settlers on Palestinians reported every year. On this occasion it led to angry protests by West Bank youth, which turned into mass demonstrations by early July and even saw street fighting in Israel proper, as the youth of Israel's own Palestinian minority displayed their support for their co-nationals across the Green Line. This lasted for several days, leaving the Israeli media to express fears of a Third Intifada.

All attempts to defuse the situation, including by Hamas, came to nothing because of Israeli rather than Palestinian intransigence. The Israeli government intervened brutally against the demonstrations, tightening its occupation of the West Bank.

Limited rocket attacks from Gaza, none of which led to any Israeli deaths, provided the pretext for threatening a ground invasion. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu instructed the army to "take off the kid gloves". Not to be outdone, his far right Minister of Foreign Affairs Avigdor Lieberman called for an invasion.

The devastating bombing campaign, when it began, was as always ostensibly directed against "Hamas terrorism", whose very existence supposedly renders impossible any peaceful solution.

Real roots of Israel's offensive

It would be a mistake, however, to regard what is happening now as being the tragic result of some spontaneous "cycle of violence", or even just of an emotive Israeli overreaction to the deaths of three young settlers. Quite aside from equating the irresponsible actions of whichever Palestinian faction had kidnapped and killed the three settler youths with the spontaneous and popular racial supremacist violence of a settler society, the fact remains that the Netanyahu government's actions have a political motive and a political context.



Collecting body parts in Abu Hussein School, northern Gaza, 30 July

Part of this context is that Hamas, acting from a position of weakness, had been moving towards an agreement with Mahmoud Abbas's collaborationist Palestinian Authority (PA), aimed at ending Hamas's conflict with the PA's leading party, Abbas's Fatah movement. This conflict had begun with Hamas's victory in the January 2006 PA parliamentary elections, and culminated in the division of the PA-ruled regions between Fatah and Hamas in June 2007, when the Gaza-based Hamas PA prime minister Ismail Haniyeh successfully defeated an attempted coup by forces loyal to the Ramallah-based Fatah PA president Mahmoud Abbas.

The proposed unity agreement, signed by Haniyeh in Gaza on 23 April this year, called for a Palestinian unity government within five weeks, to be followed by presidential and parliamentary elections within six months. Mustafa Barghouti of the Ramallah-based Palestinian National Initiative played a major role in negotiating this agreement, and it is probably not accidental that the Israeli army ransacked his offices and stole computers from them on the fourth day of their search for the three missing settler youths.

The prospect of a formal reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas caused serious panic in Israel for obvious reasons. The division of the Palestinian territories between Fatah and Hamas has been Israel's key justification to its Western allies for maintaining the military occupation and illegal settlement expansion in the West Bank, while effectively turning Gaza into an open-air concentration camp.

Israel's ruling class had also been dismayed by the 2011 revolution in Egypt and by the election in 2012 of President Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, who relaxed the closure of Gaza's border with Egypt. Morsi's overthrow in a military coup in July 2013 might have deprived Hamas of a poten-

tial point of support, but for Israel this was not enough; Hamas's isolation had to be maintained.

The Palestinians' right to choose their own leaders

The Hamas-Fatah conflict, after all, had its roots in Israel's determination to ensure that Hamas could not and would not become a legitimate and recognised interlocutor for any future peace negotiations, no matter how cosmetic and fruitless the negotiations themselves were.

As the major Palestinian party that had stood openly for armed resistance to Israel during the Second Intifada of 2000 to 2005, and that had pioneered the use of "suicide bombings" against Israeli military and civilian targets, Hamas could not be rewarded with a place at the negotiating table, no matter how strong its popular support; this, in Israeli doublespeak, would be "rewarding terrorism". Israel always reserves to itself the right to decide who shall represent the Palestinians and the USA always supports its choice.

The Hamas-led PA government that took office in March 2006 was therefore deprived of international recognition from all the major Western states and their Arab allies, subjected to sanctions including the stripping of the foreign aid contributions that constituted most of its budget, and was forced to watch helplessly as Israeli forces arrested a third of its parliament. Since that time, economic and diplomatic sanctions have been followed by a murderous siege that in the infamous words of Ariel Sharon's legal adviser Dov Weissglass would "put the Palestinians on a diet".

Forced into a "unity government" with Fatah in March 2007 by Saudi mediation as a prelude to its botched Western and Israeli-planned overthrow in June 2007, Hamas's political and diplomatic isola-

tion was intended to send a message to the Palestinians and to the Arab world: that only a Palestinian leadership that had accepted that its role was to repress the legitimate national aspirations of its own people would be considered a "partner for peace"; and that the only "peace" that such a leadership could be a party to would be one that looked much like a permanent continuation of the present day situation, of ongoing occupation and cumulative land theft.

In much this vein, Dov Weissglass in August 2004 described Sharon's strategy of military disengagement from Gaza as the "formaldehyde that's necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians", while current prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu infamously and on repeated occasions stated that the Palestinians might just as well refer to any state that might be formed out of the scraps of land left to them in the West Bank as "fried chicken".

What Israel wants is to continue its occupation and ongoing theft of Palestinian land. Meanwhile, the USA and the European Union (amiably supported by Putin's Russia) every few years provide cover for this with the charade of another peace initiative.

Two-state solution

For more than two decades successive Israeli governments have torpedoed each and every peace proposal that might have forced them to suspend, if not quite halt the remorseless expansion of Jewish settlements into the ever-shrinking territory available for a separate Palestinian state. Zionism's aim is quite simply to make impossible any sort of independent Palestinian entity, leaving the Palestinians nothing except an archipelago of tiny reservations. The more right wing forces, like Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu ("Israel Our



Israeli tanks launch ground invasion of Gaza

Home”) party, would ultimately like to clear the West Bank and Gaza of Palestinians altogether.

Harassed and humiliated on a daily basis by viciously aggressive settlers and by the occupying army that protects them, the inhabitants of the indigenous Palestinian communities resort to desperate and occasionally misguided acts of resistance or revenge, invariably meeting a disproportionately violent response from Israel.

This recurrent pattern and the dynamic behind it show clearly that the “two-state solution” is a utopia.

Peddled for the last three decades by a fraudulent international diplomatic consensus, led by the USA and by its European allies and supported by most of the official labour movement in the West, it has been accepted not only by the corrupt bureaucrats of Fatah, but even, in substance, by Hamas, who have indicated repeatedly that they would accept an indefinite truce with Israel in return for its full withdrawal to the 1967 Green Line.

Even so, every attempt to achieve this outcome, whether through diplomacy or through armed struggle, has only ever led to an even worse situation for the Palestinians. Even if it could be established, it would only create two economically unviable and disarmed enclaves, still substantially under Israeli control. Israel, however, to avoid a “two-state solution”, always comes up with new conditions that they know the Palestinians cannot accept, the latest being not just the usual mantra of the

Palestinians’ recognition of Israel’s “right to exist”, but also of Israel’s right to maintain its character “as a Jewish state”.

The “Jewish state” and Palestinian national rights

So in March 2014, Netanyahu addressed Mahmoud Abbas with the demand that the Palestinians must “abandon the fantasy of flooding Israel with refugees” and that they “must be prepared to recognise a Jewish state”. Thus, the Palestinians are offered “peace” on the basis of abandoning the right of return for the millions of Palestinian refugees driven off their land by repeated waves of Zionist settlement. And what would recognition of a “Jewish state” – a state for all the world’s Jews, not just for those who live there – mean for Israel’s non-Jewish citizens? Israel’s Palestinian minority, second-class citizens in their own country, can answer that.

Israel will never allow a separate Palestinian state enjoying any degree of genuine sovereignty, or political or economic viability to be formed in any part of the historic homeland of the Palestinian people. Israel’s own character as a state built on a project of continuing and as yet uncompleted colonisation, legitimised by a Zionist ideology that pervades its colonist-descended Jewish majority population, effectively excludes this outcome.

Any sovereign and contiguous Palestinian state with its own armed forces would close off to future Jewish settlement lands that today provide Israel with a useful

safety valve for managing its own internal class, ethnic and religious contradictions. It would also undermine the Zionist ideology that is used to justify not only the continuing theft of land in the 1967 Occupied Territories, but the very foundation of the state itself, with its mass expulsion and dispossession of between 750,000 and 900,000 Palestinians between 1947 and 1950.

Similarly, any genuine Palestinian state would sooner or later be compelled to give voice to the popular Palestinian demand for the right of return of these refugees and their descendants, today numbering some 5 million in the Occupied Territories and across the Arab world. It would also be compelled to support the demands for equal civil and political rights for Israel’s 1.7 million Palestinian Arab citizens, who constitute just under one fifth of Israel’s population within its pre-1967 territory.

In short, Palestinian national self-determination, within however small a territory, would inevitably become, in Zionism’s terminology, an “existential threat” to Israel as currently constituted, undermining it ideologically, politically and demographically. That is why Israel cannot ever concede it.

Far from being a realistic short-term goal that might provide the Palestinians with a breathing space, “two states” is simply a mirage towards which they are being drawn, while they are in reality moving towards their own national destruction.

The national liberation of the Palestinian

people will therefore most likely not proceed through their separation into a territory of their own – a feat in any case rendered more and more impossible by Israel's ever-expanding network of settlements on Palestinian land, serviced by an infrastructure designed to satisfy their needs while disrupting Palestinian life – but through the revolutionary democratisation of the present day reality of only one state between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.

Nevertheless, we support every attempt of the Palestinian people to struggle against the 1967 occupation of Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank and against its consequences. In the immediate present, this includes a struggle to lift the siege of Gaza and to end the denial, implicit in the refusal to recognise Hamas, of the Palestinians' right to choose their own leaders and representatives.

Armed struggle and mass revolt

The mass revolt of the Palestinians at the beginning of July showed the existing potential for the new Intifada, or mass uprising that the Israelis fear far more than any Hamas rockets. In East Jerusalem there have been demonstrations almost every day since the settler vigilante murder of Mohammed Abu Khdeir.

Culminating in a 10,000 strong march on 25 July from the outskirts of Ramallah in the West Bank to the Qalandia checkpoint on the road to Jerusalem, which Palestinian leaders have described as an "uprising of freedom and independence", these have been the largest demonstrations in the West Bank for over a decade.

Notwithstanding the meaningless official optimism of Fatah leaders who have no intention of leading such an uprising however much they celebrate its prospects in public, this movement could indeed develop in such a direction, given the right leadership and strategy. But to succeed it needs to be joined by people across the world exerting the maximum pressure on their own rulers.

By allowing the masses in the West Bank and Palestinians in Israel to throw their numbers into the scale alongside the besieged people of Gaza, it would help to expose the Zionist state for what it is: not "the only democracy in the Middle East", not "a land without a people for a people without a land", but an inherently undemocratic settler colony, meant to deprive an already existing people of their present and only homeland.

This is neither to denigrate nor to understate the importance of Gaza's military defence against Israeli attack, whether conducted by Hamas or by any other Palestinian organisation. That military struggle remains entirely legitimate, and must be supported by socialists and anti-imperialists

worldwide. Unfortunately, however, Iranian rockets alone will not force the Zionist state to its knees.

A political mass movement of Palestinian workers, farmers and youth in the 1967 Occupied Territories and in Israel itself, supported by a global movement of solidarity, could help to bring about domestic and international conditions that would force Israel to abandon its siege and periodic bombardment of Gaza, thereby throwing its whole policy towards the Palestinians into crisis.

Given sufficient strength, such a movement should set itself the task of breaking the deadly unity between Israel's ruling class and its privileged Jewish-Israeli working class, emboldening that small but brave minority within Jewish-Israeli society who are ashamed and revolted by the virulent racism, so reminiscent of antisemitism, only in this instance directed against the Palestinians.

Global solidarity

Israel's actions have inflamed the hatred of millions of people worldwide, who increasingly recognise it as a racist state, waging a war of terror for the destruction of the Palestinian people.

This coincides with the desperate need of the Palestinian resistance for international solidarity, both in the Western states that support Israel's atrocities and from the masses in the Arab countries – above all, in Egypt.

Socialists there must demand an end to Sisi's shameful collaboration with the Zionist state and argue for unconditional military and logistical support for the Palestinian resistance, beginning with the reopening of the border crossings.

This duty of solidarity also applies to the left and the workers' movement in the USA and Europe. Here, too, socialists must demand an end to all the support that Israel receives from their own governments, and in particular their arms sales and military cooperation.

Trade unions, student and youth organisations, left wing, labour and socialist parties, and indeed all progressive and democratic forces should condemn Israel's attack and express their unequivocal support for the Palestinian resistance to it. We should reject the argument, repeated time and again in our own mass media, that opposition to the state of Israel and its ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians is anti-Semitic. Far from it, a movement of global solidarity would also be an important point of support for, and solidarity with the courageous anti-Zionist minority in Israel itself.

We need to build on the massive outpouring of people onto the streets that has already taken place to create a movement that forces governments and businesses worldwide to stop all arms supplies, all oil

and gas supplies, in fact all trade of logistical value to Israel's war effort. We need to combat the support that Israel receives in the media, both state-owned and that of the billionaire press barons, demanding an uncensored voice for the Palestinians and the representatives of the mass movement in their support. We need to expose and confront the Israel lobby in academia.

As a starting point, we should support demands for:

- The immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of the IDF from Gaza
- The ending of the siege of Gaza by land, sea and air and the right of its people to travel to the West Bank, Israel, and abroad
- The closure of the entire network of checkpoints choking civilian life in the West Bank, and the demolition of the infamous Apartheid Wall
- The withdrawal of all the illegal settlements and their armed settlers from Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and the West Bank
- The payment of full reparations to all those in Gaza whose houses have been destroyed or damaged and the restoration of all schools, hospitals and infrastructure
- The immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and detainees
- The recognition of the right of return for all those expelled from their homes since the foundation of the Zionist state in 1948.

Bi-national workers' Palestine

But the idea that Palestine can ever be free as long as the Zionist state continues to exist is itself an illusion. The current inherently racist state must be utterly destroyed and replaced with a united and socialist Palestine; a land for Arabic and Hebrew speakers, for Muslims, Jews, Christians, Druze, Bedouins, Circassians, etc. to live and work in. It must be a secular, bi-national and multi-ethnic state with no privileges for, or discrimination against any part of its population.

The overthrow of capitalism would remove the barrier that the institution of private property in the means of production raises against workers of all national and linguistic backgrounds working together for the common good, so that disputes over who owns the land or the factories and offices can be resolved collectively.

Such a solution must be part of a liberation of the entire Middle East from outside imperialist powers and from the corrupt monarchies and military dictatorships that infest it today. And the only social force that can lead this struggle is the working class of the region; the goal that it needs to aim for being the creation of workers' states, and their unification in a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

Counter-revolution in Syria invites US return to Iraq

Lacking support, the Syrian revolution suffered a series of defeats, a consequence of which was the rise of the ISIS. **Marcus Halaby** examines the fallout of this development

ONE OF THE deceitful justifications given for the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was to prevent the spread of Al-Qaeda. Of course anyone who knew anything about the Ba'athist regime knew that there was no Al-Qaeda presence in Iraq at all. Today US President Barack Obama, elected with the promise to withdraw US troops from Iraq, is once again launching airstrikes on Al-Qaeda offshoot Islamic State, which even Osama bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri has condemned for its sectarianism and brutal methods. Surely this must rank high among examples of the cunning of history or the law of unintended consequences.

The White House was taken completely by surprise when on 10 June, what was described as just a thousand or so fighters from ISIS, the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (Greater Syria), took Iraq's second city Mosul with barely a shot being fired. Two Iraqi army divisions comprising nearly 30,000 soldiers fled, stripping off their uniforms and leaving their weapons behind. Half a million of Mosul's 1.5 million people fled the city, 300,000 taking refuge in the Kurdish autonomous zone nearby.

In the captured Mosul Airport, ISIS found several UH-60 Blackhawk helicopters and cargo planes. The treasure trove included more than \$466 million and a large quantity of gold bullion in the city's central bank.

ISIS forces and their allies rapidly headed south, taking Baiji and Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown, on 11 June. They were joined by ex-Baathist fighters from a number of organisations including the Naqshabandi Army, which is headed by Saddam Hussein's former deputy, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri.

On 21 June they took control of the important Al-Qa'im border crossing between Iraq and Syria, pushing out fighters from the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and Jabhat al-Nusra, the rival claimant to ISIS for the role of al-Qaeda's Syrian franchise. A week later on 29 June ISIS renamed itself the Islamic State (IS) and declared the territory it controlled to be a new Caliphate under the theological dictatorship of "Caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

Conspiracy theorists on the Counterpunch and Global Research websites put recent IS successes down to a US-Saudi plot to oust the Iraqi prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, and thus weaken Iranian influence in Iraq, Assad in Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Certainly the US wants to get rid of al-Maliki, or force his party and the Shia establishment in Iraq into a coalition with Sunni forces. And it is possible too that the sudden collapse of the Iraqi army was in part a result of covert manoeuvres to get him to do so. But it has to be said, that if this was a "plot", it has backfired spectacularly.

Having rejected direct military intervention in Syria, a project that the Obama administration was never enthusiastic about because it judged the US had no overriding interest there, the US also resolutely refused aid to the Syrian rebels. The reason they gave was that they could not ensure weapons delivered to the Free Syrian Army (FSA) or its allies would not fall into the hands of "extremists" like the Islamic State and its "official" Al-Qaeda rival Jabhat al-Nusra. However its allies in the Arab world, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, were actually sending arms and equipment to al-Nusra, and various millionaires from across the region were willing to fund IS too.

As a result the FSA and the groups of secular revolutionaries faced two murderous enemies, the Assad regime and the Jihadi Islamists. The parasitic dynasties and capitalists of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states used their largesse to establish hegemony over a large part of the Syrian opposition, the Islamic Front of Zahran Alloush being among the most visible.¹

Today the USA, to the dismay of Israel, finds itself forced into an undeclared alliance with the



Isis gunmen execute captured Iraqi soldiers, 14 June

Iranian regime to restore the authority of the Iraqi government over the one-third of its national territory it has lost to IS and its proclaimed caliphate. In this endeavour, it has the open support of Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional arch-rival, and the somewhat less trumpeted aid of Iran's client regime in Syria, a vicious fascist dictatorship battling for its survival, which has already conducted airstrikes of its own in the east of Iraq on behalf of Nouri al-Maliki's Shi'a sectarian Iraqi regime.²

One can only conclude that the anti-US "Axis of Resistance", supported by gullible leftists and anti-imperialists, now includes... the USA itself.³

In fact despite its left apologists, who present the Assad regime as an enemy of the Islamic State, and its Alawite-officered Syrian Arab Army as a guarantor of secularism and communal coexistence, the truth is that the Syrian regime's relations with the IS have thus far been those of a mutually beneficial non-aggression pact.

In Raqqah, the north-central Syrian city that is the Islamic State's stronghold, the one target that the Syrian air force has never bombed is IS's headquarters in the centre of the city, even as that same air force frequently drops barrel bombs on civilian targets, destroying whole neighbourhoods, and occasionally attacks the Islamic State's rivals, like the "mainstream" Salafist militia Ahrar ash-Sham.⁴

This non-aggression pact's rationale is not too difficult to understand. Firstly the Assad regime needs to sell its small but significant oil supplies to the outside world to finance its war, and has happily bought it both from the Islamic State and from Jabhat al-Nusra, ensuring they are amongst the best armed and financed of its "enemies".

The other support IS brought it was "moral", i.e. political and ideological. The Islamic State's barbaric acts provide the Assad regime with the means to terrify Syria's large ethnic and religious minorities, primarily the Christians and the Alawites, into support or tolerance of the regime. Assad has been able to use IS as the deluge in "après moi, le deluge", just as Nouri al-Maliki has done in Iraq. But as Iraq shows, this is a game not without its dangers.

The Islamic State, a parasite and an enemy

The Assad regime's murderous policy, which has displaced up to a quarter of Syria's 23 million people in a war that has killed more than 200,000 in the last three years, easily puts into the shade the atrocities of the Islamic State and provides them with a steady stream of recruits from those frustrated with the failure of Syria's ill-armed and fragmented revolutionary forces to overthrow Assad. So much so that they are willing to join the ranks of an organisation despised by almost the entire spectrum of anti-Assad opinion as a parasite on and an enemy of the Syrian revolution.⁵

The growing enmity of Syria's genuinely revolutionary forces to the Islamic State is not difficult to understand. Originally IS and Jabhat al-Nusra played an important military role after their emergence in Syria's civil war, taking part alongside the FSA in the siege and capture of Menagh Air Base between August 2012 and August 2013.⁶

Most of the areas under their own direct control today were, however, originally liberated from the Assad regime not by themselves but by the FSA or by FSA-aligned formations. The Islamic State imposed itself on these areas some time afterwards, invariably alienating the population in the process, and obliging IS to fight an on-off struggle to maintain control over them against other forces with stronger roots in that same population.⁷

The most well known of these intermittent struggles has been the Kurdish versus jihadist conflict in the far north and northeast of the country. The People's Protection Units (YPG), resting on a Kurdish population whose national aspirations have largely been ignored both by the domestic Syrian armed opposition and by the civilian opposition in exile, have borne the brunt of the struggle against this cancerous colonisation of Syria's liberated regions by a force that is frankly and unremittingly hostile to the democratic objectives of a revolution for which so many have given their lives.

In turn, this Kurdish versus jihadist struggle has been a major factor in preventing the Democratic Union Party (PYD), effectively the Syrian section of the Turkish-based Kurdistan

SOLIDARITY WITH THE KURDISH RESISTANCE TO THE ISLAMIC STATE

Martin Suchanek – Arbeitermacht, the German section of the League for the Fifth International

TODAY IT IS the Kurdish people in both Syria and Iraq, as well as national and religious minorities, who are threatened with massacres, expulsions, mass murder and even genocide, by the Islamic State and its allies from the Sunni clans.

In the areas under its control, IS rules with brutal terror not only against women and people of other religions, but also against rebellious clans that had previously been its allies. For example, 20 men of the Shiatat tribe in the province of Deir ez-Zor, near the border with Iraq, were executed in mid-August.

The self-defence forces in the Syrian Kurdish area of Rojava are the only armed group that has had any success against IS. For months, the region of Kobane has been fought over particularly fiercely. Undoubtedly, many Kurds and other minorities welcomed the bombing of IS troops by the US, and possibly also its Syrian bases by the Assad regime. Of course, it is entirely justified that they use such a weakening of IS to advance against the mass murderers themselves.

Nonetheless, the Kurds, like all the democratic forces, the left and the labour movement generally, must be clear that such support has neither "humanitarian" nor "selfless" objectives, but is ultimately just a means to stabilise the situation in the interests of imperialism. In the case of the Assad regime, the aim is to bring it into negotiations as a "lesser evil" and an ally to the West.

What the oppressed nations, workers and farmers need is not further, "more determined" or "united" intervention by the US, EU and Russia, but an end to all imperialist intervention in their countries. Therefore, we oppose any imperialist intervention, including air strikes, by the US, EU, Nato and their allies, whether on their own behalf or on behalf of the UN.

At the same time, it is clear that the proto-fascists of IS are unstoppable by "peaceful" means, such as appeals for "negotiations" between "all groups" in Iraq and Syria, as some in the antiwar movement fondly imagine. This represents not only a toothless but also a macabre and cynical "alternative" to the imperialist intervention.

Instead, we should support the Kurdish resistance and that of all other oppressed nationalities and religious minorities. In the parts of Syria held by the FSA, in Rojava and in northern Iraq, the

populations can only be successfully defended against IS if they are themselves armed, organised and coordinated.

Whoever is for their victory against the pogromists must also be for their having the means for victory. We recognise unconditionally their right to obtain weapons and logistical supplies from whatever source, including the imperialist powers or the regional powers. What is crucial is that no conditions placed on the use of those weapons by their suppliers should be accepted or honoured. All weapons must be under the control of those fighting to defend themselves.

Just how much the imperialists want to dictate such conditions can be seen from the fact that their declared overriding aim is that the Iraqi puppet government in Baghdad should not be endangered. Their military administration has not only more or less voluntarily left modern war equipment to IS, but also denied it to the peshmerga for years.

The imperialists will exert the maximum pressure to ensure that weapons do not get into the hands of the "wrong" Kurds, that is, the PKK or the Rojava self-defence forces. Although they have proved themselves to be effective fighting forces, the embargo on the region remains in full force, keeping the 100,000 strong resident population and the refugees living there under ever more precarious conditions. The ban on the PKK and its inclusion on the EU and the US lists of "terrorist groups" are not even up for discussion.

In Rojava, there has been a democratisation process and social upheaval, in contrast to the rest of Syria and the region of Iraq under the control of the PYD. Even though this by no means has a socialist character, as some on the left believe, it has brought a number of important social and democratic reforms, in particular in the field of women's rights and the equality of nationalities and religions.

Rojava also stands in sharp contrast to the situation in Iraqi Kurdistan. There, the dominant political forces of KDP and PUK are closely linked to US imperialism and also cooperated with Turkey for many years, including taking measures against the Kurdish liberation movement in Turkey and Rojava.

The fact of this reactionary leadership, however, does not mean that the brutally oppressed Kurds in Syria and Iraq have no right to defend themselves or that they should only get weapons once they

Workers' Party (PKK), from finally burning its bridges with a regime that had tolerated its existence since Bashar al-Assad's father and predecessor, Hafez al-Assad, supported the PKK's armed struggle against the Turkish state in the 1980s.

This struggle has now extended to Iraq, where IS now fights Kurdish peshmerga guerrillas in a long-established Kurdish autonomous region that lies adjacent to the Islamic State's conquests in the region stretching from Mosul to Fallujah.⁸ This has brought with it the possibility that the Kurds, long imprisoned and divided by the borders between the failed and failing states in which they now live, may yet decide to assert their right to an independent nation-

state once and for all.⁹

Imperialist intervention and imperialist non-intervention

The most instructive irony of all, however, is visible in the difference in behaviour of US imperialism and its allies when their fundamental interests are threatened – as they clearly are by the possible collapse and fragmentation of a major oil-producing state like Iraq¹⁰ – as compared to when they are not so threatened, as they were not in Syria.¹¹ While Barack Obama and Britain's David Cameron went through the pantomime of a debate in Congress and a vote in Parliament to cover their own hesitation after the Ghouta chemical attacks in

August 2013, the sudden advance of a militia only a few thousand strong in Iraq in August 2014 has seen them act without any such displays of reverence for constitutional procedure.¹² Moreover, this time they have the impatient backing of Russian imperialism's clients in the region, as well as their own.¹³

This irony, perhaps, will be lost on the one-eyed "anti-imperialists" who have raised the spectre of an imminent Western imperialist intervention to overthrow Assad (which constantly fails to actually materialise), while turning a blind eye to, or actually applauding the much more decisive Russian imperialist intervention, without which Assad would in all probability have

have established for themselves a more progressive leadership. Revolutionaries must stand for their right to defend themselves, arms in hand, against IS without for a moment ceasing political criticism of the existing, bourgeois, pro-imperialist leadership and the struggle for a working class alternative.

The very fact that a defence against the jihadists requires a common struggle with the PKK and PYD could become a major problem for the corrupt, bourgeois KDP and PUK, which are closely tied to the semi-feudal landowner families of Barzani and Talabani that have been dominant for decades. In the common struggle alongside other Kurdish groups, religious minorities such as the Yazidis, and also volunteers, men and women, from the Kurdish cities, there is the potential to undermine the political monopoly of the KDP and PUK.

As well as this, there is also the potential that, after decades of resistance and despite repeated betrayals and mutual mistrust, the unity of the Kurdish people can be established, or these divisions decisively weakened, creating the basis for the common struggle for the self-determination of the Kurdish people across all the boundaries drawn by the imperialists.

That is what all the imperialists fear, and for good reason. The US and other imperialists could tolerate a de facto independent, or at least largely autonomous state in the north of Iraq, especially if they do not manage to hold Iraq together as a state at all.

The "red line" for the imperialists, however, is that the Kurds should not be allowed, under any circumstances, to put the borders of the other states and, with them, the whole "established order" in the Middle East, into question. At the moment they can rely on the existing leaderships of the Kurds in all parts of Kurdistan. In Turkey, the PKK aims to integrate the Kurds via democratic reforms in the country and to establish the HDP as a kind of Turkish left-wing party.

In Rojava, the PYD hopes for the retention of the established structures of municipal and corporate self-government within the framework of a reformed and democratised, but still bourgeois Syrian state, a "third way".

A democratic reform of the Turkish state is an unlikely prospect, even if some sort of limited solution for the Kurdish question with an expanded democratic façade for Turkish capitalism cannot be ruled out absolutely.

A democratic reform of the Syrian regime, however, is a pure utopia. There are only two possibilities if Syria is to remain a bour-

geois state; either the Syrian revolution, i.e. what is left of the FSA and especially Rojava, is crushed by reaction in the form of the IS and its allies, or it is crushed by reaction in the form of the Assad regime. Of a "Kurdish government" nothing would then be left, absolutely nothing.

The alternative is that the Kurdish liberation struggle, by showing that IS can be fought and defeated, will become an inspiration not only for a renewal of the revolution in Syria but also for the resistance of the workers and peasants of Iraq, independent of both Sunni and Shi'ite reactionaries and of imperialism.

The fate of the Kurds, therefore, is clearly linked to that of the Arab revolution, and to the class struggle in Turkey and Iran. The liberation of the Kurdish people and an end to their national oppression is not possible in Rojava alone, but only within the framework of a democratic and social revolution in the entire region.

At the centre of such a revolution, and certainly in its first stages, will be the struggle for democratic rights, for women's liberation and the rights of all the national, religious and ethnic minorities. This can weld together a mighty popular force of all the exploited and oppressed.

All these questions are necessarily linked to a struggle against the colonial and imperialist fragmentation and plundering of the region. This is symbolised by the vast natural wealth, oil, that has quite literally fuelled the economies of Europe and North America and been squandered by monarchs and military dictators, while the people of the countryside live in misery and squalor.

To uproot this entire iniquitous system requires the involvement of the working class against all capitalist exploiters, indigenous and foreign. Only on this basis, can the fundamental issues of low wages and unemployment, social inequality, the expropriation of large landed estates, the nationalisation of the large industrial and wholesale businesses under workers' control be resolved to create a new, liberated society. It requires the political leadership of the working class in alliance with all the oppressed and exploited.

This poses another vital question, now, in Kurdistan, in Syria, in Iraq, in Palestine and in Egypt: establishing a social and political power that can bring this about, that is, the creation of workers' parties, linked together on an internationalist programme of permanent revolution, whose goal is the creation of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East.

been overthrown by the mass uprising of his people.

Indeed, for the many opponents of the Syrian revolution worldwide, both in mainstream bourgeois politics and on the international left, the Islamic State's triumphant return to Iraq after its heady growth and consolidation in Syria will probably be seen as a vindication. For those of a traditionally right wing and "realist" bent, it will be seen as proof that Arabs (and indeed Muslims in general) are not "ready for democracy", that they always need a strongman, like a Saddam, an Assad or a Gaddafi, to keep them in order and prevent them from chopping each others' heads off – and keep them from posing a threat to the outside

world.

Stalinist class-collaboration and pacifist illusions

For their mirror images on the left, who can share this racist standpoint only in heavily disguised secularist form, it will be seen as proof that the unarmed popular uprising against the 44-year-old Syrian Ba'athist dictatorship in March 2011 was always a "Western conspiracy" against a "resistance regime". On the other hand for those who initially supported the Syrian uprising but who took fright when faced with its "militarisation", represented by the formation of the FSA in late July 2011, civil war (as opposed to civil disobedience) could only ever lead to

the uprising's co-option by the interested regional and international players on whom any military struggle in the region will to some extent be dependent.

Neither of these two apparently "left wing" outlooks is appropriate for anyone who claims to be a revolutionary.

The former divides the world into "imperialist" and "anti-imperialist" camps, by which they mean pro- and anti-US/EU/Nato, as if the USA and its allies were the only imperialist powers on the planet. This ignores the fact that capitalism was restored in Russia and China in the 1990s, and that the military and economic legacies as "great powers" inherited from the post-war era allowed them to become imperial-

ist powers themselves, and they are now contesting for a “place in the sun” against the US “hegemon”.

This “camps” theory also proclaims that in semi-colonial regimes, like Venezuela, Iran and Syria, which today depend either economically, militarily or politically upon Russian and Chinese imperialism in order to defend themselves against Western imperialism, the working class should subordinate their struggles to the leaders of these so-called “progressive” regimes.

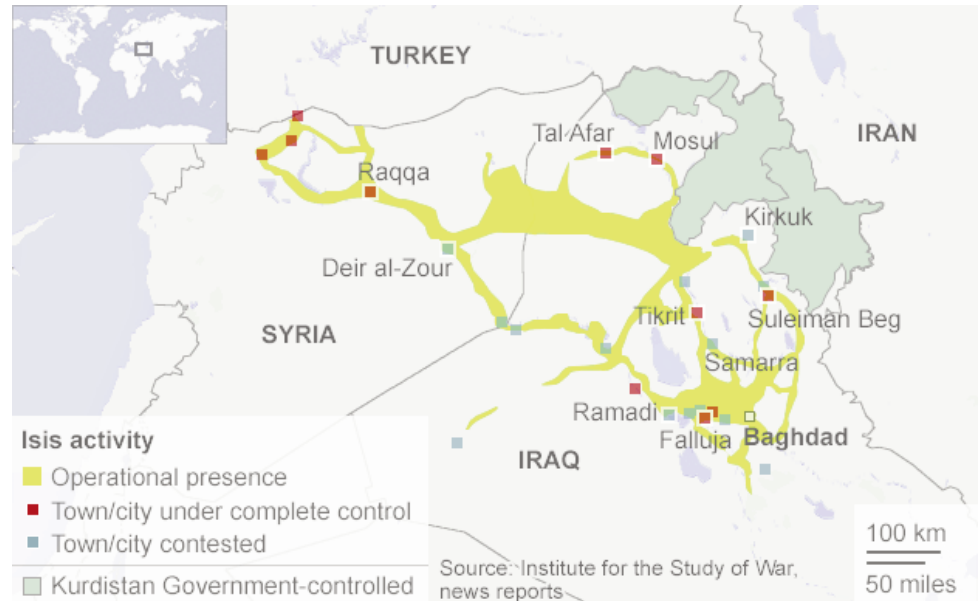
Sprinkling “anti-imperialist” holy water on these often abhorrent dictatorships, advocates of this outlook, ultimately derived from Stalinist “camps theory”, are obliged to identify themselves with these same regimes, not just against Western imperialism but also against uprisings by their own people and their own exploited classes, whose rebellion can be explained only by reference to the dark arts of Western intelligence agencies.

The latter outlook, by contrast, counsels “peaceful” forms of struggle, as if these had not already been tried and found inadequate in the face of a brutal regime and vastly superior firepower. If you are only willing to support a revolution if it can win quickly and preferably without generating too much violence or bloodshed, then frankly you have no right to call yourself a revolutionary at all. Engels famously described a revolution as “the act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon.”

Like bourgeois diplomats and civil servants for whom a temporary setback for their own state’s foreign policy is a lesser evil than the prospect of the “uncertainty” that creates such panic in global financial markets, the thing that they dread above all is protracted conflict, in which the uncomfortable life-and-death decisions made by all the available protagonists fail to fit neatly into the preconceived schemas of those who have the luxury of not having to make such decisions.

The biggest irony for the partisans of this outlook, however, is that the revolutions that actually do fit their schemas are often enough the least complete, as was the case in Egypt, where the “downfall of the regime” in 2011 took a mere 18 days and eight hundred deaths, only to reveal within two and a half years that “the regime” continued to exist and was notching up death and imprisonments into the thousands.

And yet it is hardly an exaggeration to say that it could all have been very different.¹⁴ Only seven months ago, a clear majority of Syria’s anti-Assad factions were united in trying to deal IS a blow from which it would not be able to recover.¹⁵ Even Jabhat al-Nusra, seeing which way the wind was blowing, was obliged to take part in this “revolution within the revolution”, although it would not be long before it



returned to the same parasitic behaviour exhibited by IS.

Even within the areas under IS’s control, popular resistance has quickly exposed the limits of their ability to maintain their presence by arms alone.¹⁶ The threat posed by IS in turn has acted as a catalyst for the popular alliances that are necessary for the Syrian revolution’s victory against the Assad regime, even where, as with the Kurds, these alliances have up until now been blocked by the bourgeois politics of the oppositional factions.¹⁷ The tragedy is that, like the Assad regime, IS can call upon support and reinforcements from outside its immediate theatre of operations, while the Syrian rebels have largely been abandoned by the outside world.¹⁸ But even despite this, the Syrian rebels have proved capable of holding up against the apparent odds.¹⁹

In northern Iraq’s largest city Mosul, where IS was initially welcomed or at least tolerated by a Sunni population that had suffered bloody repression and discrimination at the hands of a “Shi’a” regime, residents have also shown signs of civil disobedience, protecting their Christian neighbours much as their Syrian counterparts in Deir ez-Zor have tried to protect the Kurds.²⁰ The signs are that the initial tolerance that IS benefitted from in establishing its rule in Syria may prove to be even more short-lived in Iraq.²¹ It was politics, not battlefield prowess, that brought the Islamic State such a speedy victory in Mosul, and it is politics that will dispose of the fruits of that victory.

Revolution in Syria, and sectarian civil war in Iraq

IS’s repulsive reputation is well deserved. As early as 2005, during Iraq’s occupation-induced sectarian civil war, seven years before IS began its intervention into Syria’s revolutionary civil war, revulsion at its meth-

ods and its sectarianism was strong enough that it enabled the US occupation forces to gather together the so-called Sahwa (Awakening) movement to defeat it.

Numbering in the tens of thousands by 2008, this movement was largely composed of former anti-US Sunni fighters who were alienated by the takfiri encroachment (the sectarian practice of declaring members of other Muslim sects as apostates or heretics, who must be killed) and alarmed by the prospect of a Shi’a-dominated Iraq after the by then inevitable US withdrawal. In this way, the USA hoped to deal a blow to the remnants of the “Sunni insurgency” against their rule, while also creating a “Sunni” counterweight to Nouri al-Maliki’s Shi’a sectarian regime, in a classic act of “divide and rule”.

The Sahwa movement’s abandonment by the post-occupation Iraqi state following the US withdrawal, and the undisguised Shi’a sectarian rule that followed it must count as one major factor in the speedy collapse of the Iraqi army in Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014. There must be more than a few former Sahwa fighters today who now find themselves fighting on the same side as the takfiris of IS that the US-led occupation forces originally persuaded them to fight against between 2005 and 2009.

Nor have IS’s actions softened in the meantime; if anything, its experience in Syria has hardened all of its worst features.²² Its genocidal hostility²³ to members of the Kurdish-speaking Yazidi sect²⁴ is entirely of a piece with its past behaviour in Syria. So too are its characteristic attempts to force Iraqi Christians either to convert, to pay a special tax as infidels, or to leave their homes.²⁵

Iraq’s Kurds, Christians, Yazidis, Turkmens – and every other ethnic and religious minority threatened by IS – necessarily and legitimately resist IS encroachments

onto their areas, as indeed do Iraqi secularists and the workers' movement.²⁶ And just as the Syrian rebels do, they have every right to obtain the arms needed to defend themselves from wherever they can find them: from Iran, from the Kurdish peshmerga, from the Iraqi state, from the Syrian rebels and even from the Americans and the Assad regime. Where else should they seek them?

We do not however, call for or support Obama's air strikes on Iraq or Syria, under the pretext that this is providing humanitarian assistance, let alone military intervention by US imperialism. We should similarly be opposed to any Iranian intervention with the same pretext.

Why? Because seven years of US occupation led not to security and safety but to a humanitarian catastrophe, with well over 100,000 deaths and massive violations of human rights (e.g. in Abu Ghraib prison).

Nor do we support the project of restoring Baghdad's authority in that large swathe of Iraq that it has lost or abandoned to IS. Even with Maliki removed²⁷ from office, his own personal usefulness²⁸ to US imperialism at an end, Haider al-Abadi's new government or any likely successor to it will still be both a source of sectarian bloodletting and an agent of outside powers.²⁹

Sectarian barbarism begets more sectarian barbarism

Just as in Syria, where it has been the Assad regime's actions that bear the primary responsibility for fuelling inter-communal violence, so too in Iraq, IS's shocking barbarism did not materialise out of thin air. Nor is it simply a natural product of salafi or takfiri distortions of Islam. Its most immediate cause has been the 2003 occupation of Iraq³⁰ during the Bush-Blair "War on Terror", although one could extend it further back to the intentionally destabilising, sectarian division of power and privilege that British imperialism built into the Iraqi state from its very foundation in the aftermath of the defeat of the Ottomans in the First World War.

As one Syrian activist³¹ has pointed out, the 2003 war and occupation came after a decade of sanctions had killed a million Iraqis and forced 4 million from their homes, and itself involved the repression not just of political opposition to the occupation but also of the independent trade union movement that opposed the neoliberal policies that placed millions in penury. The occupation authorities dismantled not just military and civilian state institutions but even the education system; and the creation of a new political system that institutionalised sectarian political affiliations produced, just as it ultimately did in its original form in Lebanon, a sectarian war between communally-based extremists on both sides that left an average of 3,000 dead

every month.

The fact is that Iraq's Sunnis have every reason to fear the post-occupation Iraqi state and the pro-Iranian Shi'a militias on which it rests every bit as much Iraq's Shi'as and Iraq's minorities fear the Islamic State.³² Their barbarism is no less bad for the fact that no major global or regional power is using it as a pretext for intervention.³³ This time, however, the Iraqi state may not survive.³⁴ Even in the government-held regions, militias compete with official security forces to impose their own version of law and order, murdering sex workers and their clients³⁵ in broad daylight and detaining men from Sunni neighbourhoods who return to their families only as lifeless corpses.

Today, there is an ongoing revolutionary civil war in Syria, and a renewed sectarian war in Iraq. IS, which now rules over an ersatz "Caliphate" in the space between these two failed states, has joined these two wars together in the most graphic way possible, in the process erasing the now rather blurry border between the two countries once drawn up by an Englishman called Sykes and a Frenchman named Picot.³⁶

Sooner or later both countries' wars will acquire the same character as each other. Either Syria's revolution will finally collapse into the pitiless war of all against all that its myopic detractors have claimed that it was from the outset, or forces will emerge in Iraq's sectarian war that, like the original mass movement against Syria's totalitarian dictatorship, set themselves the goal of overcoming the dynamic of mutual fear and paralysis by removing their ultimate causes: dictatorship, foreign occupation, and exploitation.

Precisely how IS is defeated – and by whom – will be a major factor in deciding which of these two eventualities actually materialises.

Why should an Iraq in which IS – or rather, its base of support in the Sunni population – has been "pacified", i.e. terrorised by means of US air strikes, supported by an Iraqi army, Kurdish peshmerga and Shi'a sectarian militias, look any different to the Iraq that the USA supposedly left behind in 2009-10, in which a Sunni insurgency had just been "pacified" by much the same alignment of forces?

IS itself may come and go – it has already gone through several incarnations and several changes of name since the US invasion that spawned it in 2003 – but the genuine grievances on which it was able to build will remain, and rematerialise time and time again.

Conversely, an alliance of popular forces with real roots in their respective populations, acting in defence of their homes and communities, could repeat in Iraq the experience of Deir ez-Zor and of the many other locales in Syria in which the revolutionaries

have stood firm against IS's attempts to replace Assad's tyranny with its own. In this way, instead of a sectarian war in Iraq becoming a sectarian war in Syria, we could see the experience of a revolutionary war in Syria set the stage for a revolutionary struggle in Iraq.

This strategy will require people to advocate it – a party, to use a word that has become less fashionable in recent years – and such a party will have to base itself on the struggles and the material interests of the working class, the only force in society whose historic interests point it towards a world without privilege or exploitation. But no amount of good intentions will enable this outcome if it is US imperialism or its newly found Iranian allies that are the agents of IS's demise. We should oppose Obama's air strikes for precisely this reason.

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Hot autumn or winter freeze?

Britain's public sector unions launched a coordinated strike on 10 July to break the pay freeze. With a further strike due on 14 October and the TUC organising a national demo under the slogan, "Britain needs a pay rise" on the 18th, **Jeremy Dewar** reports on the tasks facing trade unionists

BRITAIN REMAINS IN a fragile economic recovery. Latest figures released in August show unemployment still riding high, though down to 2.08 million; the rate fell to 6.4 per cent over the quarter. Paradoxically, however, average wages, excluding bonuses, rose by just 0.6 per cent in the year to June, the slowest rise since records began in 2001. Including bonuses wages fell by 0.2 per cent, the first fall since 2009.

Meanwhile UK GDP rose by 0.8 per cent in Q1 of 2014 – though this is still 0.6 per cent below pre-recession levels in 2008. It is expected to grow by 2-3 per cent this year. However while the dominant service sector (about three quarters of the economy) is already 2 per cent higher than in 2008, manufacturing and construction remain 12 per cent off their 2008 levels (though both are in recovery), so Chancellor George Osborne and Business Secretary Vince Cable's promise to "rebalance" the UK economy has proved empty.

Although UK budget deficit is falling, it remains stubbornly above £100 billion. This is because unemployment is high, boosting benefits spending, and wages are still pegged to the floor, reducing revenue. Real wages – adjusted to take account of inflation, which stands at 1.9 per cent (CPI) or at 2.5 per cent according to the RPI index, which more accurately reflects living costs – continue to fall.

Teachers have lost 15 per cent of their spending power since 2010; council employees 20 per cent. The TUC reckons the average public service worker is £2,245 down on their real income of five years ago. Contrary to bourgeois propa-

ganda, the private sector picture is much the same.

As a consequence, UK debt is at a record high at £1.27 trillion or 75.6 per cent of GDP. The interest on this debt, another major reason for the budget deficit, costs over £1 billion a week – money paid directly to the same banks and finance houses, whose bailout triggered both the debt crisis and the subsequent recession.

Despite Prime Minister David Cameron and Osborne's gloating over this "recovery", it is clear that the Bank of England is in the dark about the true state of the UK economy. Governor Mark Carney admits there is a range of risks affecting the economy, such as heightened geopolitical tensions, a weak recovery in the Eurozone and UK household indebtedness. The Monetary Policy Committee is split over when to raise the Bank's interest rate from the historic low of 0.5 per cent and most commentators now expect the inevitable rise to come early next year.

The recovery has not led to more industrial investment; in fact it has fallen in proportion to GDP. Productivity rates are stagnant or even falling, the bosses rely on cheap labour rather than new technology.

Furthermore despite the upturn, there has been no slackening in austerity, as the government's attacks on the public sector and its workers continue. Nor has the increase in precarious jobs relative to full-time jobs slackened either. Zero hours contracts, temporary contracts, part-time jobs and unpaid posts have tended to replace full-time posts.

Alongside this, the workforce has aged,

with 767,000 under 25s out of work (16.9 per cent, a full 10 points higher than the average rate), while 1.09 million over-64s are in work, up 36 per cent since 2010 as a result of the abolition of the compulsory retirement age and cuts to state pensions.

But the key to the enigma of falling real wages accompanying falling unemployment lies in the dramatic increase in, and type of self-employment being created. The self-employed total stands at 4.6 million, the highest figure ever and 15 per cent of the workforce. More than half the 800,000 jobs created in the past 12 months and two-fifths of all new jobs since the last election have been self-employed.

Some of these, like in construction, are entirely bogus, saving employers in National Insurance contributions, holiday and sick pay entitlements as well as bypassing established rates and conditions for the trade. A great many, however, have been the result of an increasingly draconian benefits system, pushing claimants into paying themselves far less than the minimum wage and working incredibly long hours.

Government statistics show that the self-employed have suffered a 22 per cent drop in income since 2009; according to TUC chief Frances O'Grady, they earn on average just £207 a week, less than half the median wage, while working two hours a week longer.

On the other hand, the recovery is of course very real for the fat cats. The Sunday Times Rich List tells us that the wealth of the top 1,000 people has risen 15.4 per cent to an incredible £518,975 billion in the last 12 months. Britain's 100 billionaires own over £300 billion between them. Top CEO's have

| Year | No. of strikes | Workers involved (000s) | Days lost (000s) | Services (000s) | Manufacturing (000s) |
|------|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 2008 | 144 | 511 | 759 | 752.5 | 6.4 |
| 2009 | 98 | 209 | 455 | 454.1 | 1.1 |
| 2010 | 92 | 133 | 365 | 356.3 | 9.0 |
| 2011 | 149 | 1530.2 | 1389.7 | 1379.7 | 10.0 |
| 2012 | 131 | 236.8 | 248.8 | 236.7 | 12.1 |
| 2013 | 159 | 553.7 | 444.5 | 437.5 | 7.1 |

Source Office of National Statistics

Strike figures since the economic crash reveal that, once the big strikes of July and November 2011 are stripped out, union leaders have offered no resistance

seen their pay rise by £200,000 last year and are expected to receive a 33 per cent pay rise this year. They now earn 160 times more than their staff, pocketing the average worker's annual salary in just two days.

Trade union response

So how have our union leaders responded to this unprecedented attack on working class living standards? Round after round of austerity policies have emanated from the Con-Dem government since they came to power in 2010 – and an estimated 60 per cent of the cuts have yet to be implemented.

Our union leaders have had plenty of time and no shortage of arguments to rally a counterattack. Remember, it wasn't the unions that caused the economic crash; they hadn't lifted a finger for years. So they had the moral high ground, but did they have the will or the courage to fight back?

Looking at the incredibly low strike figures since the crash (see table) suggests a negative answer. The exception was the mass 2011 one-day strike in defence of our pensions. Unfortunately this action petered out shambolically into a defeat, as right wing union leaders pulled out of the fight and signed up to a sell out. In truth the TUC narrowed its horizons just to pensions – and to only public sector workers' pensions, at that – when it could have mobilised around the wide-ranging austerity attacks against all workers.

The TUC did precious little else after this fiasco. During this period it scandalously failed to mount a national campaign of action to defend the NHS from cuts and privatisation, leaving campaigns, like the successful Lewisham Hospital one, to fend for themselves.

Even the "left" union leaders have come up way short. McCluskey's bluff was called by Jim Ratcliffe at Grangemouth. The PCS, NUT and UCU have all wavered, hesitated, and fallen back into single trade disputes after experimenting with coordinated one-day actions at great lengths apart. The "left" blue-collar unions, like the RMT, FBU and CWU, have restricted their members' activities to trade disputes rather than a generalised, i.e. political struggle against the Tory government. In the case of Royal Mail, Billy Hayes and Dave Ward have engineered a strategic defeat with barely a strike, except for those called from below.

But there has been some very determined and militant local strikes, as at Lambeth College where the strikers have mounted indefinite strike action and at Doncaster Care UK which has just announced another three weeks strike to add to the 48 days on strike so far. London tube workers, Hovis, Argos and Ritzy Cinema workers have all taken stands in defence of their conditions or for a living wage. In all these cases, to one degree or another, the strikers themselves have determined their own strategy from negotiations to community outreach to nominating strike days.

The significance of sustained action is that it puts indefinite strikes on the agenda again. It cuts against the union leaders' tried and trusted (and failed) tactic of a one (or occasionally two) day strike, which is designed not as a means of winning the battle, but as a means of "reopening negotiations". One day will never win a dispute, although it can provide the platform for a very good protest, so long as it's the prelude to more sustained action.

Over a million workers came out on strike on 10 July this year against the government's pay freeze. Workers from several unions, the NUT, Unison, Unite, PCS, GMB and FBU, took to the streets and picket lines in a fantastic display of militancy. This was the largest day of action since November 2011. The response from workers to the union's call gives the lie to the pessimists who claim workers are not ready for action or "lack confidence".

Every time the union executives have called their members out there has been an overwhelming positive response from activists that have rallied the rank and file to action. Unsurprisingly there is, however, a growing mood amongst workers that one-day action is not enough. The initial proposal from Unison for a two-day strike in September was popular, while their climbdown to one day on 14 October was greeted with disappointment.

Given the wide-ranging nature of the austerity attacks there is also bemusement amongst workers that union leaders are restricting their calls to action around the question of wages. If we're making a sacrifice to reverse the decline in wages, workers' arguments go, why not demand an end to academies and free schools, privatisation and contracting out, service cuts and job cuts?

There is a real danger that union leaders will

fritter away the momentum that 10 July started – indeed that is their clear intention. Nevertheless, each and every action they are forced to call, like the TUC national demo on 18 October, provides a platform for activists to rally workers in struggle and place further demands on the leadership. But that takes organisation.

Local government workers from Unison, Unite and GMB are already committed to strike action on 14 October. Unison members at the Food Standards Agency have also voted for a strike over pay. Unison members in Academies are being balloted, as are Unison and Unite members in the NHS. Activists in the NUT and other unions will have to step up the pressure on their leaders to join the 14 October strike.

But just asking the trade union leaders is as fruitless as asking the bosses or the Tories to concede. Irresistible pressure is needed in both cases. If they call action, good, in fact we should demand that they do so and that they step it up all the way to all-out indefinite action. We should demand that they coordinate the action among all the different sectors and that none of them settle until all have received acceptable offers.

If the leaders won't do it, then the rank and file need to organise with a view to building a movement from below which can take the action itself. In every union that walked out on 10 July, strike or action committees at local level should be built, in the first instance to pile pressure onto our leaders so that they don't settle for peanuts or sell out, but also to organise independently of the leaders in the event of such a sell-out.

Rank and file organisation

The question of rank and file organisation like this has been a topic of discussion on the left in Britain for a few years now. The debate – centred on the questions, "Is a rank and file movement possible right now?" "What does a rank and file movement look like?" and "How does a rank and file movement relate to today's working class?" – really started to develop in 2012.

Several things happened in that year. First, the "left" led public sector unions, NUT, PCS and UCU, utterly failed to develop a strategy independent of the centre and right wing unions, Unite, Unison and GMB, in the pensions dispute, leading to acrimonious infighting, disuniting and suspending strike action, and defeat.

That this debacle was bookended by equally disastrous, if less far-reaching defeats in the private sector – the British Airways dispute in 2010-11 and Grangemouth in 2013 – under the leadership of the Unite's "left" General Secretary Len McCluskey signalled that something was wrong, not only with British trade union leaders, but also with the socialist left's strategy.

The second development towards the end of 2012 was the growing discontent within the Socialist Workers Party, the largest far left group in Britain, over their trade union tactics. The SWP built itself in the 1970s around its rank and file orientation, but by the 2000s had effectively abandoned this, preferring instead to build links with supposed lefts, like Billy Hayes of the CWU and Mark Serwotka of the PCS.

This culminated in 2011 in the formation of Unite the Resistance (Utr) as a “hybrid body” that is neither a traditional Broad Left nor a fully-fledged rank and file movement. The excuse given then as today:

“Even though we would ideally like to see a militant national rank and file movement able to act independently of the trade union bureaucracy, the current reality is that in most situations rank and file workers lack the confidence to take action without an official lead.” (Ralph Darlington, *International Socialism* 142)

The problem with this argument is that it simply goes round in circles: the rank and file lack confidence, so they do not launch strikes independently of the bureaucracy; the bureaucracy lead disputes to defeat or, at best, minimal concessions, so the rank and file lose confidence in taking action. Rather than break this downward spiral, Utr reinforces it.

On the eve of Royal Mail's privatisation and the CWU leadership's monstrous betrayal of their members by failing to call any action whatsoever, the SWP invited General Secretary and left-talker Billy Hayes to address a Utr conference. He was never called on to break the anti-union laws and lead strike action. When a Workers Power member heckled to this effect, he was told to shut up – by the SWP full-timers!

Both subsequent splits from the SWP, *International Socialist Network* and *Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century* (RS21), started to rethink this doomed, pessimistic strategy, though neither has at yet successfully resolved the problem.

In attempting to answer the question, “Why is a rank and file movement needed?” it is worth returning to the classical Marxists. Marx and Engels' message was that the trade unions should be the tribune not just for this or that trade, but for the working class as a whole. They noted with dismay the narrow and conservative outlook of union leaders in the 1st International that detracted from the fight for socialism. Luxemburg, Lenin and Trotsky also provided insights into the role of a growing bureaucracy at the head of the unions and a labour aristocracy that provided the material base for these officials.

Trotsky noted how the bureaucracy operated as a caste. This caste mentality was the reason why the “left” union leaders could not be relied upon to provide an alternative strategy to the “right wing” union bureaucrats. Trotsky's writings on the British General Strike exposed how the “lefts” in the end could not produce a different perspective to the “rights”. Some lean more on the workers than the labour aristocrats, and certainly all lean on the workers at some time, otherwise they would not get re-elected. But despite

these differences and vacillations, they are all part of the bureaucracy.

If trade unions are to be transformed into organs of struggle for socialism then an independent rank and file movement needs to be built to fight the bureaucracy as an agent of compromise with capitalism within the workers' movement. In this sense rank and file movements will always have a role to play, even in periods of retreat where it would still be possible to regroup militants on the back of disillusionment with bureaucratic sell-outs. Such regroupment would hasten the rebuilding of shop floor strength.

Currently the workers' movement is very much on the defensive. The present union leadership will be presiding over a rout if we do not change our tactics. A new fighting leadership is required which can only be forged in the heat of battle against the Tories and the bosses. A rank and file movement can provide that new lead and must win the trade unions over to a political programme that is for the overthrow of capitalism and for socialism.

Turning the tide

A victory for the Tories and the bosses will increase their confidence to strike further blows for austerity and against union organisation. The Tories have more draconian anti-union laws in their sights, as they target strikes in the public sector whilst they continue to dismantle our services. The next recession will see the knives sharpened even more.

Unfortunately if our leaders won't step up to the fight, they certainly won't step out of the way for those who would. For the left in Britain – and this includes the People's Assembly, the SWP, and the Socialist Party – it will be not enough to cuddle up to the left union leaders as the short cut to successfully building a movement. We cannot afford to wait for the left bureaucrats to give an “official lead”. The latter have no strategy for stopping the austerity offensive.

This has been made abundantly clear time and again. Look at the union leaders' evasive stance on the anti-union laws, based as it is on deep-seated fear. Any serious workers' struggle which is prepared to win solidarity action and enforce picket lines will be subject to legal attacks. Union leaders know this and are not prepared to fight the law. We have to spell out clearly what is necessary to win.

Rank and file militants need to state that coordinated and indefinite strike action is urgently required to fight now on a number of fronts. This means defying the anti-union laws and deploying the full weight of our industrial muscle if they are invoked. Increasingly, as the stakes get higher and higher in defending working class interests, the need for a General

Strike will loom larger amongst those workers intent on winning.

An independent rank and file movement in each union and across the unions is needed to organise this resistance. The tasks of democratising our unions and turning them into class struggle organisations are interlinked.

Workers' democracy has to be at the heart of any new movement. Workers should control the running of their disputes: strike committees elected by mass meetings and no secret negotiations behind the backs of the workers. Dissolving the bureaucracy means all officials should be elected and subject to immediate recall by those they serve and be paid the average wage of workers in their industry. Such a programme for renovation means putting the unions on a war-footing, escalating strike action as the best way of defending and winning concessions.

One of the most successful attempts at building a rank and file movement recently was the Sparks' campaign to defend their conditions under attack from new contracts. The Unite electricians were prepared to organise outside of the official structures and pulled off a brilliant victory in their struggle. Unite has also seen the campaign to elect a militant rank and file candidate in Jerry Hicks which attracted nearly 80,000 votes. These two campaigns both show that it is possible to begin the process of establishing a rank and file movement today.

In every union and in every industry militant workers will have had experience of being thwarted in their battles against management by the bureaucratic indifference or incompetence of union officials. Even in the unions that have seen action, like the NUT, there is confusion at the long drawn out tactics and stalling of action that has characterised that union's hesitancy in battling the Tories. There is a layer of militants then that could be organised and that will grow if recent defeats by “left wing” official strategies turn into a rout. The point though is to build an effective rank and file alternative to ensure that we snatch victories from the jaws of defeat.

Workers Power believes the beginnings of a movement can be started right now. With this in mind we are supporting a cross union rank and file initiative that will be meeting on the 8 November. At the recent Sparks' AGM, with its banner “National Rank and File Committee Construction” to the fore, the initiative was publicised and support was expressed by a number of electricians. We would urge all our readers to attend and start the exciting task of building a rank and file alternative, the better to ensure that we do have a hot autumn rather than a winter freeze in the class struggle.

Murder by racist cop sparks unrest

Jeff Albertson – Workers Power USA, the US section of the League for the Fifth International

THE EXECUTION OF unarmed black teenager Michael Brown by white police officer Darren Wilson on 9 August provoked almost two weeks of protest on the streets of Ferguson, an impoverished suburb of St Louis, Missouri.

Solidarity demonstrations erupted across the country, not just in protest at the impunity with which police kill Black youths, but against the entrenched social oppression which makes Black Americans second class citizens in their own country.

Michael was shot six times – twice in the head – despite having his hands in the air showing clearly to the officer who killed him his cooperative demeanor and nonviolent intentions.

To add to the grief and anger of the inhabitants of Ferguson, Chief of Police Thomas Jackson released to the media a video showing somebody, supposedly Michael Brown, robbing a convenience store right before the shooting. The purpose was clear: to smear Brown – who had no criminal record – as a violent thug who had probably provoked the police officer who shot him.

In reality, it was a crude character assassination; Chief Jackson later went on record admitting that the offending officer had no idea that Brown might have been a suspect in a store robbery. There would have been no reason for the officer to assume Brown would be in any way violent or a threat. After being harassed by the officer, Brown was peacefully retreating. As the autopsy report commissioned by Brown's family demonstrated, the bullet groupings were consistent with shots fired from a distance.

High-profile incidents of brutality and violence against Black people – particularly the young – by white cops from overwhelmingly White police departments have become a “normal” aspect of American life.

People have become all too familiar with the most recent and infamous names and cases: Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, Oscar Grant, Eric Gardner, and now Michael Brown. However, what

many people are still unaware of just how common it is for Black people nationwide to die at the hands of police, security guards, or of vigilantes like George Zimmerman. And to this must be added the impunity they routinely benefit from – Zimmerman walked free after murdering Trayvon Martin in cold blood.

The statistics are simply astounding. In New York City, for example, Black people are 25 per cent more likely to be shot by police than Whites. According to a recent NYPD report, Black people comprised roughly 70 per cent of all shooting deaths in just the first half of 2013. Think that sounds terrible? Consider this: throughout the entire United States, a Black man is killed by police roughly every 28 hours.

Couple these realities with worsening racial segregation in neighborhoods and public schools, deleteriously affecting quality of life and education for millions of communities of color, mass unemployment afflicting Black youth, rampant poverty and misery, and pitifully low wages for those fortunate enough to find jobs, and one can easily understand the outrage and rebellion gripping Ferguson and other districts and cities.

This was movingly expressed by Michael Brown's mother Lesley McSpadden to local TV news station KMOV:

“You took my son away from me,” “Do you know how hard it was for me to get him to stay in school and graduate? You know how many black men graduate? Not many. Because you bring them down to this type of level, where they feel like they don't got nothing to live for anyway. They're going to try to take me out anyway.”

Michael had graduated from Normandy High School eight days before his death and was due to enroll at Vatterot College technical school on 11 August. His teachers called him “a gentle giant”.

Resistance is futile?

The “shock and awe” repression dealt out to peaceful protests by the militarized police and

National Guard is not just the reaction of a racist police force which views Black neighborhoods as warzones to be occupied. It is a conscious attempt to demonstrate to Black communities across Missouri and the United States that it is futile to resist – let alone challenge – the White supremacist foundation of the capitalist state.

Peaceful crowds chanting “hands up, don't shoot” faced sniper rifles trained on them from military grade armoured vehicles, tear gas, smoke bombs, sonic weapons and rubber bullets.

Mass incarceration and intimidation of journalists were used to suppress the protests. 78 people were arrested on Monday night alone, and at least 13 journalists were arrested. The Federal Aviation Authority even imposed a No Fly Zone over Ferguson in an attempt to prevent the country and the world witnessing the repression.

Nevertheless, while the police chiefs in Ferguson might be willing to simply crush the protests with extreme violence, they are clearly under pressure from Federal bodies concerned that the images broadcast around the world could provide the spark for a more general uprising.

The race question

Ferguson is 70 per cent Black but only 6 per cent of the police force is Black. In a population of 21,000, a quarter of the residents live below the poverty line and in the surrounding areas, this rises to 40 per cent. Generalised unemployment and low-wage work leave a median household income of just \$14,390 per year. Another crucial aspect of social oppression is the political repression and loss of civil rights engendered by the criminal justice system.

While African Americans comprise around 13 per cent of the population, they make up 40 per cent of the male prison population. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). This has increased enormously since Ronald Reagan's 1980s War on Drugs. Police have used drug laws to imprison much higher numbers of young Black males,



despite evidence showing drug use is no higher amongst Blacks than their White peers. Conviction and imprisonment under felony drug laws has serious political consequences – loss of civil rights for long periods or for life.

The US constitution allows individual States to disenfranchise convicted felons after their release from jail. In the 2012 national elections, such laws blocked a record 5.85 million Americans from voting; up from 1.2 million in 1976. Whilst this robbed 2.5 per cent of the electorate in general of the vote, the figure was eight per cent for Black voters. This has been referred to in a 2012 book by Michelle Alexander as “the New Jim Crow”, a reference to the repressive laws imposed on the former slaves after Abolition and supposedly in turn abolished as a result of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

The reality is that the structural racism of the United States is maintained by a ruling class thoroughly imbued with the white supremacist premise inherited from the colonial project. The former slave population has won formal equality – but this ‘equality’ is policed by a racist police force or else embodied by illusions in the Black so-called ‘leaders’ like Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and Barack Obama whose privileges were won in exchange for their services in mediating, diverting and ultimately delegitimizing the agency and struggles of the mass of the working and declassed Black population.

The active and passive participation of the white majority is structurally integral to the segregationist system. Here too the at best verbal anti-racism of the union leaderships has to be mentioned. Of course the division of labour engenders the stratification of the working class along material, cultural and social lines in every country. Capitalism always knows how to apply the principle of divide and rule through the exploitation of the antagonisms and fears of different strata.

Those who perceive themselves to be either objectively (through higher wages, better living conditions, preferential treatment at the hands of the state) better off than others transform this through the permeation of capitalist ideology into subjective ideas that this derives ‘naturally’ from their skin color or nationality. It requires a conscious political struggle to overcome this division, so injurious to the interest of the workers as a class.

In the United States this process has entrenched itself for hundreds of years. As mentioned above

the demonization of the black population did not end with abolition, and the partial gains made through the Civil Rights movement were rolled back by the ruling class offensive launched under the guise of the ‘war on drugs’.

Whilst by no means all Whites buy into the racist narrative about Black people, for those involved either in direct competition for low wage work or particularly in the repressive state apparatus, it is much easier to rationalize their daily activity by adopting the racist ideology of the ruling class. It is from this material position of justifying relative privilege that comes the fear of the Black population.

But those intimately involved in the violent suppression of the Black population, especially those directly charged with the responsibility of keeping Blacks subordinated as second-class, low-wage sources of expendable labor for US finance-capital – the police, vigilante groups, etc. – have good reason to fear the hostility of the people who they oppress. This accounts in large measure for the spontaneous “White rage” with which cops humiliate, harass and execute Black youths.

Implications

However, the resistance in Ferguson and the national and international response it has generated is forcing the state to attempt to calm things down by a show of going through due process, limited investigations and promises of reform.

The St. Louis County Grand Jury will decide whether Officer Wilson should be indicted on criminal charges. Federal authorities from the Justice Department are considering pressing additional charges, citing the potential violation by the offending officer of US civil-rights laws. Attorney General Eric Holder, on behalf of President Obama, is presently stumping around Ferguson in an attempt to reassure both Brown’s family and the resident populace that there will be a “fair and full investigation”.

However experience shows time and again in such cases that both the “justice” system and the agencies it is supposed to hold to account are typically inclined to protect one another. That is precisely why no trust or confidence should be placed in either the bourgeois judicial process or the apparatus of the courts. Instead, the community of Ferguson should democratically organize itself to elect a “justice committee” to oversee all aspects of the investigation and possible future trial. All evi-

dence must be made available to such a committee. It should have the power to confirm or veto the assignment of any trial judge. The ability to confirm or reject a potential jury must be part and parcel of its authority.

But alongside winning justice for Michael Brown, the community of Ferguson has to protect itself from the forces of the state now and in the future. There must be no more killings. The degradation and racist violence must be brought to an end, and the only way to do that is for oppressed communities of color to “police” themselves.

Self-defense is no offense

Democratic assemblies of the people of Ferguson should be organized – with the aid of the organized labor movement – to both help form, and provide material and financial support to, armed neighborhood safety patrols and to provide direct oversight of their activities. These should be extended to encompass, as much as possible, the surrounding neighborhoods. Such self-defence groups should be representative of the ethnic composition of the communities in which they operate to ensure their accountability.

The racist cops are the major part of the problem, so simply remove them from the equation. Let the workers and poor of Ferguson organize their lives and provide comprehensive safety in a manner the bourgeois police never can.

Killer cops, National Guard, and KKK vigilantes must be driven out of Ferguson and the surrounding majority Black neighborhoods.

The fight for justice for Michael Brown, and the countless others who came before and, until the system is overthrown, will come after, does not end with the punishment of Officer Wilson; it is just the beginning. For that, the causes of the centuries of social oppression suffered by Black people in the United States must be ripped up by the roots; the capitalist system – which is the structural basis for modern day Black oppression – must be abolished and replaced with a democratic, socialist society embracing the full and equal development of Black, White, Brown, Latino, Asian, – indeed, people of all colors.

The base organization of this should be done via the mobilization of the organized labor movement in a massive campaign for civil rights and social equality – concentrating particularly on the most deprived and exploited sections of the working class, and through this emphasis drawing White workers into common struggle with their brothers and sisters of color.

Such a movement could mobilise tens of millions into political struggle – confronting and shattering the illusions in and the nefarious influence of the Democrats, paving the way for a new kind of party. This would be a fighting organization, a political party of a multi-racial working class that will set itself the strategic task of forcibly taking all power out of the hands of the capitalist class through revolution and destroying for good their forces of repression at the same time. Afterwards, we will then be able to look back at our racist, exploitative and unequal society, as it exists today, as a horrible nightmare that, thankfully, has been buried for good.

Fragile recovery, robust aggression, looming crisis

International Perspectives – passed by the International Executive Committee of the LFI, June 2014

IT IS NOW a commonplace to remark upon the increased tension in international relations. The coincidence of the crisis in Ukraine with the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War has not been lost on even the most complacent of commentators. Inter-imperialist rivalries have now sharpened to the point where the seizure of territories is contemplated and there is, once again, the real possibility of armed clashes between the USA-EU-Japan allies and a potential Russia-China block.

This can be seen not only in Eastern Europe and the arc of instability that stretches from North and East Africa, through the Middle East and Iran into Afghanistan and Pakistan but also along the East Asia/Pacific Rim and in the crisis-wracked states of West and Central Africa. In the Middle East, Libya, Syria and Iraq are all in a state of disintegration; the fruits of US occupations and interventions, either direct or by Washington's Saudi and Gulf state allies. Meanwhile, the US has silently approved the installation of a counter-revolutionary military regime in Egypt that has already inflicted a death toll, mass arrests and torture on a scale that outstrips the crimes of Mubarak, achieving in months what he carried out in decades.

The lines of potential conflict are reflected in the US deployment of its military assets; in Europe, as well as the long established core countries of NATO, US F-16 fighter planes and paratroopers are now stationed in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and military "partnerships" are offered to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

To cover the Middle East, 10,000 US troops are based in Kuwait and another 25,000 are in the Persian Gulf region. Obama has admitted that the US will leave 10,000 troops in Afghanistan after the deadline he set for complete withdrawal expires.

To this must be added the US "Pivot to Asia", brazenly aimed at "containing China" by strengthening military and naval forces along the entire

western shore of the Pacific. The US already has nearly 90,000 troops here: 40,000 in Japan, 28,000 in South Korea, and thousands on bases in the Indian Ocean (Diego Garcia), the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Obama even talks of a belt of alliances and mutual security right across Asia, linking his two fronts. Here, however, he will find himself confronted by the already established Shanghai Cooperation Organisation that brings together China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for both economic and military purposes. For China, this represents the first foundations of a new "Silk Route" by which to enhance direct economic links to Europe and dynamise the development of its own vast interior.

These international tensions, and their potential for rapid escalation, have been most clearly revealed in the Ukrainian conflict. The last months of 2013 and the early months of 2014 witnessed the development of the ongoing crisis caused by attempts by the USA and the European Union and their allies in the nationalist forces in Kyiv to force through an Association Agreement that would decisively break Ukraine's continued ties to Russia and open the way to Nato membership. The Euromaidan movement, a bogus revolution, was soon revealed as another US attempt at "regime change".

The belligerence of the US, its refusal to allow a compromise, indeed its preparedness to sabotage one agreed by European powers, and its willingness to rely on fascist forces to install the government of its choice, all went to show that this was no purely local confrontation between rival oligarchs. On the contrary, it is part of a global strategy by which Washington hopes to restore its role as the world hegemon. In this particular theatre of operations, the objective is to extend Nato's control to the very borders of Russia. Bringing Ukraine and Georgia into the Alliance, along with Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, would make the Black Sea

into a Nato lake and allow the projection of Western influence far into central Asia.

Inter-imperialist rivalry, however, is not limited to a return to the bipolar confrontation of the Cold War. US policy over Ukraine also contains an occluded conflict with Germany, blocking Berlin's plans for economic links to China and Russia. The US, with the aid of its ever-loyal British ally and its satellites in Poland and the Baltic states, intends to create a military-economic barrier that will not only bottle up Russia but also thwart German plans. Similarly, sanctions against Russia, designed to cripple its economy and lay the basis for popular discontent and an eventual "colour revolution", will also have the effect of disrupting economic ties to western Europe, again especially to Germany. This will not only mean removing a market for finished goods but replacing Russian oil and gas with US supplies, if fracking proves as productive as has been claimed. Russia has responded to the US-EU offensive by consolidating its Eurasian Economic Union with Kazakhstan and Belarus and closing a \$400 billion gas deal with China.

The emergence of China as a new imperialist power is, perhaps, the most destabilising factor of them all. Its dynamic economic growth played a crucial role in the underpinning of US superiority in the "globalisation" period but, by 2006, the sheer size of the Chinese economy began to have an opposite effect. Having out-competed all significant rivals, China's demand for raw materials began to force up world prices at the same time as its feverish expansion and progress into much more sophisticated sectors of production ensured rising labour costs at home.

The historic importance of this became clear from China's ability to withstand the turbulence of the 2008-9 crisis and even exert a positive influence on economic recovery in some regions; this was now a capitalist Great Power in its own right, a new imperialist power whose continued growth

could ultimately only be secured at the expense of others. That this is well understood, and has been long prepared for in Beijing, can be seen in many ways such as the wholesale modernisation of its armed forces, including the construction, for the first time in six centuries, of a trans-oceanic navy, the rapid expansion of capital investment overseas, particularly in Africa and Latin America but also in such strategically important locations as Sri Lanka and, most recently, in the promotion of a potential alternative to the IMF in conjunction with Brazil, Russia and India. Unsurprisingly, this has all been accompanied by an uncompromising assertion of its immediate regional interests, most noticeably in the dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea.

Meanwhile, Japan has also become more bellicose under the government of Shinzo Abe in the rows over those islands, presenting further possibilities of flare-ups. Proposals to remove from the Japanese constitution many of the limitations on the size and potentially offensive role of the armed forces are a clear sign that their use in that capacity is being contemplated.

In South Asia, the electoral victory of Narendra Modi's BJP in India had been assumed to presage a sharp turn towards the "West" because of Modi's record of neo-liberal policy in his home state of Gujarat. However, since his election there have been increased contacts with China and Xi Jinping held separate talks with Modi during the BRICS meeting in Brazil in July. This is to be followed by state visits not only to India but also Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The prospect of a rapprochement between China and India would be the clearest sign yet of the profundity of the forces reshaping world politics over the coming decades.

The evidence of increased inter-imperialist rivalry, then, is both mounting and compelling, but what is driving it? After all, it is not so long since it was widely accepted that "globalisation" had definitively overcome the turbulence of the twentieth century. This journal always rejected that argument and insisted that, while "globalisation" might be a useful term to describe the period, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in which US imperialism had been able to impose its will throughout the world, it was only a phase within the imperialist epoch and it would generate its own downfall.

In the February 2007 issue, before the sub-prime mortgage crisis gave the first indication of developing problems in the US economy and a year and a half before the collapse of Lehman Brothers triggered probably the deepest financial crisis in capitalist history, we wrote,



India's new rightwing premier Narendra Modi

"... important developments in the world situation have to be seen against the fundamental tendencies that are at work beneath the surface of capitalist society. The imperialist epoch's general tendency towards decline expresses itself in the present period by over-accumulation of capital and the profit rate's tendency to decline, its weakening power to develop the productive forces and, in general, an increasing decomposition of bourgeois society ... Contrary to the claims of the bourgeois globalisation enthusiasts (plus their left-wing stooges) the present cycle in no way expresses a new "long wave" of economic upswing of global capitalism but rather a continuation of its crisis and declining growth rates."

Against those who believed that China's growth had allowed it to "decouple" from the US economy, meaning it would continue its upward trend even if there were a downturn in the US, the same article said,

"...any significant decline in the US economy could be expected to have an immediate impact on China's export-oriented industries."

Two years later, when the enormity of the crisis was acknowledged by everyone, we drew the further conclusion that this was no mere repetition of the "business cycle", a cyclical downturn that would soon be replaced by a return to growth. On the contrary, we argued,

"... a historic crisis of the capitalist system has opened that can only be resolved by an equally historic destruction of capital and redivision of the world's sources of surplus value, raw materials and markets ... the economic cycles in the coming period will be marked by severe contractions and stagnation with only weak and faltering recoveries ...

These conditions will encourage inter-imperialist competition and sharpened class struggles against a background of the continued development of a severe ecological crisis."

Behind our predictions of weak and faltering recoveries, which have been vindicated by subsequent developments and, as we shall see, were confirmed most recently by the IMF's latest World Economic Outlook, lay the recognition that globalisation, like the imperialist epoch itself, was an expression of what Marx called the "countervailing tendencies" to the tendency of the rate of profit to decline. Although falling profit rates were a consequence of the over-accumulation of capital and could, therefore, only be fundamentally restored through the destruction of excess capital, Marx noted that this tendency could be offset, at least temporarily, in a number of ways. He himself cited, among others, intensification of work, expansion of foreign trade and cheapening of constant capital as examples.

In the case of globalisation, many such factors came into operation; US global political power and control of international agencies such as the World Bank and IMF gave it the means to force semi-colonial countries to open their markets to US goods and to privatise previously state-owned sectors of their economies; financial support and loans were made conditional not only on high interest rates but on the adoption of "structural adjustment programmes" that financed repayments by cutting government spending on welfare and social services. A further very important factor, that allowed US capital to hold down, and even reduce, wages in the USA itself, was the development of Chinese capitalism, which provided an



US unions' "Fight for 15" campaign has scored successes

apparently ever-increasing flow of ever-cheaper goods.

Such factors allowed US capital to remain profitable without the clearing out of excess capital. Unwilling to write-off huge past investments in now obsolete production facilities, such as many car plants, US corporations turned to various forms of financial speculation where quicker returns could be made. In the aftermath of the collapse of the "dot com" boom and the Al Qaeda attack on the World Trade Centre, the Federal Reserve cut interest rates and unleashed a flood of cheap credit to corporations and consumers alike.

It was this combination of cheap credit and financial speculation that set the scene for the financial crisis of 2008. Ironically, the measures taken to control that crisis, whose fundamental cause was an over-accumulation of capital, were aimed at limiting the destruction of capital. Central bank purchase of banks' "non-performing assets", that is, loans that could not be repaid, the reduction of interest rates to near zero, a stimulus package of \$400 billion and then massive monthly injections of money through "Quantitative Easing", prevented a collapse of the banking system. However, it was the failure to deal with the root cause of the crisis that led us to predict "weak and faltering recoveries".

Six years after the onset of the crisis, the scale of the recovery thus far has confirmed our prediction. Of course, recessions and recoveries are not uniform in depth or duration in different economies. The scale of the 2008 crisis, and the resulting collapse in world trade, ensured a high degree of synchronisation in its impact around the world but recoveries depend on many factors specific to the different major economies and not least to the policies their governments pursue.

Among the established imperialist powers, for example, although Germany suffered a decline in GDP of 5.1 per cent in 2009, it saw growth of 4.0 per cent the following year but slowed to 0.7 per cent by 2012. By contrast, the US GDP shrank by 2.8 per cent in 2009, returned to a growth rate of 2.5 per cent in 2010 and then, after a slowdown in 2011, reached 2.8 per cent in 2012. Meanwhile, in Spain, GDP was down by 3.8 per cent in 2009, only returned to a minimal growth rate of 0.1 per cent in 2011 and then shrank in both 2012 and 2013 by 1.6 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively. The comparable figures for the UK are -5.2 per cent for 2009, 1.7 per cent in 2010, 1.1 per cent for 2011, 0.3 per cent in 2012 and 1.8 per cent in 2013.¹

Because GDP figures are compiled in much the same way in all major economies, except China, they are reliable enough indicators of relative changes in economic activity both over time and between different economies. However, because, despite the name, they measure activity, the volume and value of transactions in an economy, not "production" as such, GDP figures give a misleading picture of economic "growth". An increased number of housing transactions does not necessarily mean any increase in houses, even more significantly, increased activity on a stock exchange could represent a speculative bubble as much as increased output by the companies whose shares are being traded.

In the light of this, it is particularly significant that manufacturing output has not regained pre-crisis levels in any of the "western" imperialist powers. According to the UK's Office of National Statistics, the US has come closest, 2.6 per cent below 2007, while the figure for the UK is -7.6 per cent and Italy, France and Japan are still more than 10 per cent below.

In the aftermath of the recession, unemployment rose in all major economies, but by very different degrees and on very different timescales. Annual rates in France and Germany, for example, rose from 7.8 per cent to 9.5 per cent and from 7.5 per cent to 7.8 per cent respectively in 2008 and 2009, thereafter, the rate in France continued to rise to 10.6 per cent in 2012 while Germany's fell back to 5.3 per cent in the same period. A much greater contrast is seen in Spain: from 11.3 in 2008 to 24.9 per cent in 2012.²

In the USA, 8.7 million jobs were lost from February 2008 to February 2010, unemployment rose from 4.7 per cent in November 2007 to peak at 10 per cent in October of 2009. There was then a steady increase in employment figures over the following three years and March 2014 saw the recovery, at least in numbers, of all jobs lost during the recession, with 9.163 million created since 2010. However, it should be noted that many of these jobs are in the low-paid "service industries" where wages are below the cost of reproduction of labour power so that even those in work have to claim "benefits" and rely on food stamps and soup kitchens.

The (cyclical) recovery, much trumpeted in the popular press of the Anglo-Saxon world is not treated so optimistically in the more serious reports. The IMF's World Economic Outlook, (Spring 2014) noted that in the old imperialist heartlands, investment was still falling as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP), while in the "emerging markets"

there was no prospect of growth rates returning to pre-2007 levels.

From this it concluded:

"An important concern is the possibility of a prolonged period of very low growth ('secular stagnation') in advanced economies, especially if new shocks were to hit these economies or if policies do not address crisis legacies as expected."

A similarly downbeat tone has been adopted in its most recent Outlook, published in July 2014. Having adjusted down its forecast for global growth by 0.3 per cent to 3.5 per cent, it estimated that "global recovery continues but at an uneven pace, and downside risks remain".

It went on, "Global growth decelerated more than expected in the first quarter of 2014, largely because of temporary setbacks, including a sharp correction to an earlier inventory build-up and the effects of a harsh winter on domestic demand in the United States.

"Growth also disappointed in China as policies were tightened to dampen credit growth and housing market activity. Growth moderated in other emerging markets due to softer external demand and also because of slower-than-expected investment growth."

This continued weakness of productive investment indicates lack of anticipation of profits at a higher rate in that sector. However, the mass of corporate profits in the USA has increased massively and the stock exchanges have boomed, indicating "growth" primarily in fictitious capital. In June, the Dow Jones Index rose to the historic high of 15,000 points, just two months later it broke the 17,000 barrier. US credit figures confirm the trend; in the first quarter of this year, corporate borrowing rose by 9.3 per cent, compared to the previous quarter's 7.7 per cent and total US credit reached a historical peak of \$59,399 trillion, 347 per cent of GDP.

Despite the still low overall rate of growth, consumer credit rose by 6.6 per cent in the same quarter. Apart from the disparity with the GDP growth rate, the significance of these figures is that the loans have been taken out at artificially low interest rates, when interest rates begin to rise, as they would do automatically in any sustained recovery, and as they are bound to when Quantitative Easing is removed, repayments will become increasingly difficult, preparing the basis for another financial crisis.

Without productive investment, employment in the sector critical for surplus value generation will not grow substantially and employment will tend to concentrate yet further in unproductive or lower than average productive sectors. This in turn will not give a consumer-led boost to the economy or a feel-good factor when it comes to elections.

Against this background of a very faltering recovery in the established imperialist states, various apologists of capitalism focussed on supposed alternative engines of economic growth that might take over the role of restoring the global economy to vigorous growth. The first choice for many was the BRICS group, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Several of these did, indeed, begin to post relatively high growth rates shortly after the lowest point of the international downturn. Brazil, for example, went from a shrinkage of 0.3 per cent in 2009 to growth of 7.5 per cent the following year and both India and China maintained growth even during the 2008 crash and reached 8.5 per cent and 9.2 per cent respectively in 2009. However, growth rates could not be sustained in any of these countries; Brazil slumped to a mere 0.9 per cent in 2012. The kernel of rationality in the identification of the BRICS as a significant group of countries was that several of them did benefit strongly from the huge stimulus package introduced by one of their number, China, which boosted imports of raw materials, energy and foodstuffs from the others.

Not to be discouraged by the failure of the BRICS to rescue capitalism, other pundits alighted on a different set of countries, the MINT group, Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey as evidence of the restorative powers of capital. While several of the BRICS were beginning to disappoint the pundits by 2010-11, Mexico transformed a previous shrinkage of 5 per cent in 2009 into growth of 5 per cent in 2010 and Indonesia went above 6 per cent in all three years after 2009. Turkey transformed a decline of 4.8 per cent in 2009 into growth of a full 9 per cent just one year later. Here too, however, as a group, the MINT could not keep up the pace; although Nigeria was able to post more than 6 per cent in 2012 and 2013, Mexico was down to 1.2 per cent and Turkey to 3.8 per cent by the latter date. One factor that threatens these and other "emerging markets" is the prospect of US interest rates rising; as soon as even the possibility that Quantitative Easing by the FED might begin to taper off was mentioned, capital began to flow back to the US from such economies in anticipation of quicker returns.

Political consequences

It is the faltering character of the recovery from the deepest recession in modern times that provides the material basis for greater belligerence on the part of capital both regarding the domestic class struggle in each country and the international rivalry between the Great Powers. The new period in world politics is thus one of

sharply increased inter-imperialist conflict in which, to use Lenin's clear and straightforward formulation, the Great Powers are preparing for a redivision of the world.

This is not to say that there is an imminent threat of direct conflict, as opposed to confrontation, between the Great Powers themselves. On the contrary, what is to be expected is a combination of extensive use of "soft power" to advance their strategic interests and of localised battles between smaller states which, even where they do not begin as "proxy wars", have the potential to draw in the principals. Moreover, while it is ultimately the underlying economic dynamics that are driving the Great Powers towards confrontation, political turmoil in apparently less important countries could provide the trigger for the next economic crisis just as readily as another spectacular bankruptcy such as that of Lehman Brothers.

This scenario highlights the need for revolutionaries to assess national or regional political developments by reference to this bigger, global picture. All such incidents have their own characteristics, derived from the class struggle in the particular country, but the potential involvement, overt or covert, of the imperialist powers makes more important than ever the development of politically independent working class parties. Internationally, too, revolutionaries must be alert to the strategic aims of the different imperialisms, emphasising that, as well as solidarity with all struggles against exploitation and oppression, in all the imperialist countries themselves, the main enemy is at home.

These fundamental principles are more important than ever because of the experience that imperialism has gained from a wide range of movements that originated as democratic oppositions not only to Stalinist bureaucracies, as was the case with Solidarnosc, but also to other oppressive regimes such as apartheid South Africa and the Philippines under Marcos. Clearly, the lessons learnt were central to the "colour" revolutions in Europe and more recently the Euromaidan in Ukraine.

The potential for similar interventions also exists with regard to China. Most immediately, in addition to democratic rights, including political and trade union rights throughout the country, the crucial issues include the national questions in Tibet and Xinjiang, the widespread corruption of its Communist Party-business elite and the increasing number of environmental calamities.

The capitalist development of China has inevitably brought with it all the dynamics of a class-divided society and, despite the dictatorship of the Party, elemental forms of class struggle. In the context of rapid growth, these have been sufficient to force improvements not only in



Chinese Foxconn workers protest against conditions that have driven 15 of their number to commit suicide

pay and working conditions but also social security entitlements, housing and education. Recognising the potential for the development of radical, anti-regime movements, some moves have been made towards changing the role of the official state unions but there has also been a steady growth in forms of self-organisation and demands for elected union negotiators are increasingly common.

It is in this flux, that unions and NGO's based in the "democratic" imperialist powers, particularly those funded by European social democratic parties and unions, are increasingly active in promoting their own model of class collaborationist and labour aristocratic trade unionism. This is not only fully in keeping with "western" imperialist strategy for undermining the regime but is also a dangerous trap for the Chinese workers whose principal needs are for mass-based, democratically controlled unions and a politically independent workers' party able to advance workers' interests against bureaucrat, bourgeois or imperialist alike. Against such exercises of "soft power", Beijing has already demonstrated its ability to mobilise Han chauvinism in anti-foreign, especially anti-Japanese, campaigns and economic prosperity has allowed concessions to be made both to resolve specific conflicts and to provide reforms. Clearly, this would be threatened by any sustained slowdown in international trade.

Against this background of simmering inter-imperialist rivalry and faced with the prospect of another financial crisis in the not too distant future, working class organisations, both trade union and political, have shown only the most limited capacity to defend past gains. They have been prepared to accept real terms wage cuts, or even give-backs, in order to limit job losses amongst their own members, doing little or nothing to organise those forced into "precarious" working conditions or the ever increasing numbers of youth who see no prospect of employment at all, let alone jobs that fulfil their aspirations. That this should be true of the political descendants of those who led the betrayal of 1914, the reformist parties and unions, should come as no surprise. All too often, as with the British Labour Party or Germany's Social Democrats, they led governments that implemented the policies that contributed to the crisis.

More surprising, at least initially, has been the inability of the major tendencies originating from Trotskyism to recognise what the US and the EU have been doing in Eastern Europe and, more specifically, Ukraine. Far from warning that the "Euromaidan" movement was of a piece with the various

"colour revolutions", initiated and funded by the Western imperialist block, led by the USA, these groups, with the Fourth International to the fore, equated it with the genuine, spontaneously democratic, movements of the Arab Spring and the resistance to austerity in the EU.

The root of this error lies in their long-standing misinterpretation of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution as a "process" that ensures the achievement of historically progressive goals by mass movements, even where they lack revolutionary leadership. Having seen the potential of Tahrir Square, but failed to see the danger of either the Muslim Brotherhood or mass illusions in the army in Egypt, they appear to have assumed the same content for the Maidan movement simply because of the superficial similarity of the occupation of a town square. This blinded them not only to the reactionary, pro-EU, demands of the Maidan but even to the very obvious leading role of fascist organisations in the movement.

This then led them to recognise the legitimacy of the Yatsenyuk government that ousted the elected (but certainly corrupt and authoritarian) government of Yanukovych with the support of fascist militia and rewarded them with ministerial posts. By now completely oblivious of the evidence of US involvement in bringing that government to power, they then compounded their errors by seeking to minimise the slaughter in Odessa and Mariupol, accepting on this, as on everything else, the blatant misinformation of the western media in presenting the victims as the aggressors.

Vitaly important as the conflict in Ukraine is in its own right as an advance in the geo-strategic position of the US-led western imperialists, it is also a true sign of the times, an expression of the warlike dynamics of an increasingly unstable world. In this respect, the abject failure of much of the Left, the ease with which the supposed heirs to those who raised a revolutionary banner in 1914, forgot all the lessons learnt at such cost, underlines the urgent need for a new, Fifth International. Its watchword will be, once again, the main enemy is at home!

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A Populist, not a Communist Manifesto

The anti-fascist resistance in Ukraine is debating what its goals and methods should be. Dave Stockton offers a critique of the Manifesto

ON 6 JULY A conference took place in Yalta, in the Crimea, dedicated to opposing the war launched by the right wing nationalist and fascist government of Ukraine that was installed by the Nato-sponsored coup in February.

Its Russian and Ukrainian participants adopted a “Manifesto of the People’s Front for the Liberation of Ukraine, Novorossiia and Transcarpathian Rus”.

“Trotskyist” supporters of the February Maidan coup have accused this manifesto of being a Russian nationalist document. The accusers include members of Socialist Resistance, the British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty in Britain¹. The AWL brazenly supports the regime installed by the Maidan against the antifascist resistance, Socialist Resistance pretends to be neutral but repeats all the arguments that Ukraine is primarily a victim of Russian imperialism and those resisting in the east and in Crimea are tools of Putin and have no right to self-determination.²

Only from the standpoint of a Ukrainian nationalist, for whom the country is indivisible and every square inch inalienable, no matter what its inhabitants think, could this manifesto be judged as separatist let alone Russian nationalist

What the Manifesto is not

Of course, some of the people who attended the Yalta conference, and voted for the Manifesto, may have been separatists or Russian nationalists. Indeed, this is even likely after four months of bombardment and fascist pogroms that have been endorsed by the “democratic” western imperialists who are determined to impose a Greek-style neoliberal austerity programme on the country and draw it into Nato. However, what they voted for does not call for the dismemberment of Ukraine, quite the opposite; it is absolutely explicit on this matter:

“Does the struggle in the south-east (Novorossiia) amount to separatism? No, the territory of the struggle is the entire territory of Ukraine... We shall establish a new, free, socially responsible people’s power on the whole territory of Ukraine and Novorossiia.”

The Manifesto’s goal is defined as “a just, socially oriented, people’s republic on the territory of Ukraine.”

For the drafters, this means, free medical care and liveable pensions, social security, and state capital as the dominant force in the economy, plus controls over large fortunes etc. In short, it is an anti-neoliberal, old-style, left social democratic definition of a “social republic” or “welfare state”, one where capitalist property relations would

still operate, though supposedly under the control of the democratic state.

Why this is a utopia we will deal with later.

Likewise, the method of bringing this state into existence is defined as “a democratic revolution”, no signs of authoritarian Russian Nationalism there, either.

“Political power will be constructed in line with the principle of direct popular representation (people’s power) – from the bottom upward. Organs of people’s power will be formed, beginning at the level of local Councils and extending upward to a Supreme Council, according to the principle of representation of delegates from territories, of delegates from labour collectives and from professional bodies and councils, and of delegates from political, religious and community organisations.”

The Manifesto envisages a federal structure in which each region will have its own budget and taxes, an anti-crisis fund, and will safeguard “overall state languages” and specific regional ones. However, as well as this considerable autonomy, it envisages a central/national government, ensuring that “each region will be obliged to observe the general state principles applying to the relations between labour and capital, and to civil and political freedoms”.

The central government will be charged with “defence, the maintenance of the cen-

tral state apparatus, for the construction of objects of overall national importance, for scientific research, for maintaining health care and education, and for the development of infrastructure.”

Revolutionary socialists certainly have fundamental criticisms of this; it is not a socialist, anticapitalist programme, but for sure it is also not a reactionary or Great Russian chauvinist document aimed at dismembering Ukraine and subjecting it to Moscow's control.

The Manifesto's description of what is happening in Ukraine is fundamentally correct:

“A popular liberation uprising is under way against a liberal-fascist regime that seeks, through terror and propaganda, to impose a criminal oligarchic and comprador capitalism in our country”.

The “anti-terrorist” campaign waged in the south and east of the country, the pogrom in Odessa, the indiscriminate bombardment of the civilian population of Mariupol, Donetsk and Luhansk and the driving out by these means of hundreds of thousands of people constitute a monstrous crime.

The plans to “reform” the country on the basis of a neoliberal destruction of its industries and social services, under a machine of state repression heavily staffed by outright fascists, makes it completely justifiable to refuse to recognise the Kiev regime and to rise in rebellion against it.

The fact that, for its own imperialist objectives, the Putin regime has given aid, does not invalidate this in the least even though the brutal Nato-supported offensive necessarily drives the resistance to greater and greater dependence on Moscow, just as Assad's brutality in Syria drove the popular resistance to appeals to Washington.

The media of the Nato countries have systematically covered up Kiev's atrocities because they are directly implicated in the coup and from the beginning have encouraged the right wing nationalists and fascists, with the purpose of dragging the country into the “western” sphere of domination and exploitation.

Criticisms

Nevertheless, despite its social, democratic (and social democratic) demands, this remains a very confused document with heavy debts to Stalinism and populism and completely insufficient criticism of Russian nationalism and imperialism.

The big problem of the document lies in its avoidance of a clear and explicit class analysis of what is happening in both Russia and Ukraine.

This is all the more important because the population of the country is still heavily working class and for seventy years Ukraine was a workers' state, albeit a bureaucratically degenerated one. By this we mean that, whilst the economy was state owned

and centrally planned, the workers had lost political power to a privileged and repressive bureaucracy and the democracy of workers' soviets, rooted in the workplaces, had been replaced by a fake parliamentary system.

Last, but not least, in the case of Ukraine and other Soviet republics, the right to self-determination, up to and including full independence had not existed since the early 1920s.

Whilst the Manifesto correctly denounces the rapacious oligarchs who seized ownership of the state owned means of production in Ukraine in the 1990s, and correctly envisages their re-nationalisation, it ignores three major facts.

The oligarchs' pillage of state property was part of the restoration of capitalism. No adjectives are needed to qualify this. Of course, the neoliberal shock therapy and the seizure of assets by oligarchs from bureaucratic or criminal backgrounds are the specific form that it took. Nonetheless, it is capitalism in general that is the enemy of the workers and farmers of Ukraine and Russia alike. This needs to be recognised, and said openly because, otherwise, the road is open to the idea that some sort of “social” or “humane” capitalism is possible or desirable.

Capitalist restoration took a similar path in Russia, although on an even greater scale, and the regime of Vladimir Putin is just as much an emanation of this new capitalist class, dominated by oligarchs, as is the regime of Ukraine. The difference lies in the fact that, as a nuclear “great power”, it is able to play an independent role vis-a-vis the USA and the European Union headed by Germany.

Even if the highly corrupt seizure of assets had not taken place, even if the capitalists who bought up the industries and commerce of both countries had been as honest as the day is long, the means of production would still be in the hands of a few monopolists and they would still be pursuing the neoliberal policies that their class brothers and sisters have been pursuing in the USA and the European Union for decades.

Therefore, whilst it is natural to stigmatise the oligarchs as the ruthless band of crooks that they are, it is necessary to go further and identify them, first and foremost as capitalists.

More dangerously, the Manifesto only names and condemns “usurious financial capitalism”, as if those capitalists who lend money at inflated interest rates were the main problem. This identification is entirely within the bounds of populism, whose horizon is that of the small (petty) bourgeoisie, who find themselves crippled by the high interest rates of the banks and moneylenders and by the competition of the big firms. This is the kind of limited “anti-capitalism” that even fascists adopted (whilst acting as the servants of the great industrial and financial monopolies). There is also a worse

construction that can be put on the formulation: “usurious capital” has in the past been used as a euphemism, or code word for “Jewish”.

Given the history of Russia and Ukraine, this should be recognised and completely rejected. Likewise, drawing attention to Orthodoxy and the “Christian tradition and heritage” is dangerous because of the role they played in White Guard reaction, proto-fascism and anti-Communism.

Even if the drafters were far from intending such meanings, any democratic, let alone a socialist, state should give no privileged position to church or mosque or synagogue. A secular state, which separates all religious institutions from the state and the school, will allow voluntary associations of believers of all faiths the freedom to practice them but will also ensure that non-believers and their children are not coerced or induced into religious observation.

The only genuine anti-capitalism is one that targets all capitalists, industrial and commercial, as well as those in banking and finance, who extract surplus value/profits from the unpaid labour of wage earners.

Nor does state ownership of the largest sectors of the economy, in itself, represent an anti-capitalist solution since, as long as the market dominates the goals and direction of the economy, and the state remains the state of the capitalist class, these sectors will act as state capitalist trusts.

To call the state a “people's state” is only obfuscation in any class society. The “people” includes all classes, the question is; which of the two essential classes of bourgeois society, the capitalists or the workers, the exploiters or the exploited, is to control the instruments of coercion?

If what is meant is that the working class should use its own state power to take over and consciously plan production and distribution in order to end social inequality and injustice, then it is necessary to say so. Not least because this identifies the prime agency for achieving “social justice”, the class that must lead the struggle.

True, the Manifesto talks of the state being the largest holder of capital and controlling the strategic sectors of the economy and of this capital being controlled by the people's representatives. But capital is a social power, inseparable from capitalists as a class whether or not they directly own this or that enterprise. There have been many states, especially in the so-called third world, where the state has controlled the “commanding heights” of the economy, without them becoming either workers' states or socialist.

If the Manifesto is calling for working class control of the economy, then two related and essential levers are required to effect this; the seizure of political power by the working class via democratic workers' councils (soviets in the 1905 and 1917



18 June: ten thousand miners march in Donetsk demanding an end to Kiev's offensive

sense) and the establishment of workers' control of production and distribution by those who work in the factories, offices, shops, the means of transport, the banks, etc.

"Workers' control" means control over the existing management, vetoing any decisions which are against the workers' interests, while at the same time learning from them all the techniques of organising production and distribution, exposing the exploitation and corruption which went on under the former owners, tracking down their robbery and restoring property to those whose labour created it.

With this knowledge, it will be possible to decide democratically the needs of workers as consumers, and develop a democratic plan to meet those needs. As planning becomes more widespread and efficient, the role of the market and all its inequalities will become narrower and narrower.

People's Front

The Manifesto presents itself as the basis for a popular front, that is, a political alliance between the working class and sections of the capitalist class on a programme that is acceptable to those sections. This is one of the historic differences between the Trotskyist and Stalinist traditions. Obviously, its main attraction to anti-fascist militants fighting in Ukraine today is that it is linked to the Communist International's strategy, after 1934, for the fight against fascism in Spain, France etc.

As Trotskyists, we believe that the popular front was then, and would be now, a disastrous distortion of the tactics and strategy of revolutionary communism. Moreover, it is a distortion that, since its adoption in the Thirties, has led to nothing but defeats for the working class and its allies. It is of fundamental significance that it had no place in the practice or theory of Bolshevism or the Communist International in Lenin's time.

We do recognise that, in its resistance to fascism, the working class should seek the support of forces from other classes and strata as well as itself. These could include the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, the progressive intelligentsia, oppressed nationalities and races, even individual capitalists and military leaders. As Trotsky said, the working class does not reject the assistance of anyone in its own progressive struggles.

The problem with the popular front, as opposed to the alliances developed by Bolshevism and the Communist International of Lenin, such as the alliance with the peasantry and the anti-imperialist united front, is that it is a bloc not with an exploited or oppressed class or stratum, but one with a segment of an oppressor or ruling class and one that comes at too high a price; the postponement, or abandonment, of the class struggle of the proletariat, the motive force of the struggle for socialism.

For Stalin and Dimitrov³ the People's Front was a bloc with the liberal capitalist class (in France and Spain). Both of these were imperialist classes that oppressed and exploited colonies. Establishing and maintaining the Popular Front with them necessarily involved a pledge not to threaten their ownership of the large-scale means of production, industrial, financial and agrarian. It necessitated the working class limiting itself to defending democracy and fighting fascist and reactionary forces.

Worse still, the Popular Front deprived the anti-fascist struggle itself of its most powerful social force, the proletariat's class struggle. This meant not just the struggle for power but any serious anti-capitalist actions, such as factory occupations or the general strike, because, by definition, they would alienate the "progressive bourgeoisie". In addition, it denied anti-fascism the assistance of the force of the class struggle of the peasantry (land seizures) and the resistance of oppressed nations, or races, to their "democratic" rulers.

Furthermore, by protecting the state power of "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie, it opened the working class to their sudden "betrayal". In short, Trotskyists predicted that this strategy would lead to catastrophic defeat. And it did. In Spain, most obviously, but later also in Indonesia and Chile.

What would it mean in Ukraine today? With which non-proletarian classes, who are not "toilers", is such an alliance to be formed? Of course, there are middle classes and farmers, but they hardly constitute an independent class whose "price" for an alliance is for the workers to abandon their struggles. If this was not the case in 1917, then how much less is it the case today? In fact, the more decisive and determined leadership the working class can offer to other popular classes, the more of them will rally to it.

Last, but not least, by envisaging and realising a common government with bourgeois forces, the Popular Front broke a principle that went back to the classical Marxists in the Second and early Third Internationals. Thus Karl Kautsky, when Lenin considered him an orthodox Marxist wrote:

“So long as the class contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat remains irreconcilable there can be no state power capable of attracting the confidence of both classes and for which both classes can simultaneously vote the means of existence.”

We also notice that the Manifesto uses the word “Fascism” in a way that has its origin in Dimitrov and Stalin’s definition, “Fascism is the open terrorist and most reactionary, most chauvinist, and most imperialist elements of finance capital”. (Main Report delivered at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International)

It is certainly true that fascism can be used by finance capital, but its own ranks are drawn from the outraged and frightened petty bourgeoisie and from the most backward elements of the working class and the lumpenproletariat. It is not itself an “element of finance capital”.

Equating the two creates the danger that, if finance capital finds it necessary to use a different strategy, less terrorist, more “democratic”, to achieve its goals, the drafters of the Manifesto would see that as a victory. By the same logic, if a “democratic” outcome to the present crisis would be a victory, then a “Popular Front” with capitalist forces, even forces of finance capital, would be an adequate basis for conducting the present struggle. As in Stalin’s day, this incorrect analysis of fascism opens the way not to the struggle for socialism but to a supposed “necessary” stage of bourgeois democracy, a limitation that will strangle the working class movement today, just as it did in the Thirties.

The National Question

There is no doubt that a government/ regime of Yatsenyuk, Poroshenko, Yarosh, and leaders like Timoshenko, promised nothing but discrimination and oppression for the Russophone section of Ukraine’s citizens. This is inherent in their statements that Ukrainian is *the* national language, their determination to linguistically Ukrainianise the population of the east or south, or to ethnically cleanse, that is, drive them out, altogether.

Anyone who covers up or excuses such a policy on the grounds of Ukraine’s history of national oppression, whether they call themselves anarchists, communists or Trotskyists, is acting as a reactionary bourgeois nationalist, not a proletarian internationalist. No degree of national oppression justifies a reversal of oppression and discrimination, or visiting it on an entirely innocent people. As the history of Zionism shows, it is possible to use the most terrible genocide as a pretext for the project of cruelly oppressing and displacing another people. It is outrageous to blame today’s Russophone Ukrainians for the crimes of the Tsars or Stalin and his successors.

The oppression of the Russophone people of the Ukraine, especially in the south and east (Novorossiia) consists of the denial of equality in the use of their language. It should be recognised, how-

ever, that this is not as severe as that endured by Ukrainian speakers in the past. This is the subjective reason for the attempts to bring about a renaissance of the Ukrainian language at the expense of Russian. As is shown by attempts to revive Irish Gaelic, it is no easy matter to displace a language that has become established. To do so by discriminatory legislation, by banning the mother tongue of a section of the population from schools, courts, the media, etc. can only have reactionary consequences.

There is no question that Ukrainians suffered severe oppression both during the forced collectivisation of the early Thirties and the bloody purges of 1937-8. There were also severe attacks on Ukrainian language and culture. Other nationalities within Soviet Ukraine/Crimea, particularly the Tartars and the Volga Germans, also suffered terrible oppression in the form of mass deportations in which huge numbers perished.

At other periods in the history of the USSR, in the 1920s and 1950s and in the early 60s, the Ukrainian language and culture were positively fostered. Indeed, without the conquest of illiteracy after the Russian Revolution, a mass Ukrainian national consciousness would hardly have developed.

Though the Soviet Constitutions of 1918 and 1936 both included the right to self-determination, including secession, there can be no doubt that, during the rule of Stalin and his successors, subject nationalities were obstructed from expressing their wishes as to independence or not. The tragedy was that independence, when it came, also meant capitalist restoration and a brutal slump on a scale similar to, or worse, than that during the Great Depression of 1929-33.

Related to this was the fact that, thanks to 60 years of Stalinism, there was no genuine Bolshevik party capable of opposing restoration and fighting for an independent socialist Ukraine, within a free federation of such states, including Russia.

A restoration of Russian domination is something that millions of Ukrainians in the centre and west of the country legitimately fear, just as, after the February coup, Russian speakers feared the reverse. This is unlikely to be Putin’s objective today, given the balance of international forces, and it is plainly not the intention of many of the resistance forces or the drafters of the Manifesto. Nonetheless, it is true that some Russian nationalists, who have come to aid the struggle, do openly voice such views.

Although the Manifesto criticises the Russian oligarchs for not really wishing to aid Novorossiia, it does not denounce and renounce any occupation or seizure of Ukraine’s territory by Russian forces. Russia is, as we argue elsewhere in this journal, an imperialist power itself. For this reason, Putin is resisting the western imperialist block’s attempt to alter the neutral status of Ukraine between Nato and Russia, and between the EU and Putin’s attempted Eurasian economic block.

On this issue, Putin is not the aggressor but the defender of the status quo. However, this does not make him, or Russia, any the less imperialist. Russia’s bloody wars in Chechnya, Putin’s support for the Assad dictatorship in Syria, indicate that he does not head a progressive block. Strategically, independence for Ukraine means independence from Russia quite as much as it means independ-

ence from Nato and the EU.

On this basis, and on the basis of opposition to neoliberalism and the defence of democracy, it is possible to win over the workers of the central and western Ukraine, to win over units of the army sent to oppress the population of south and eastern Ukraine/Novorossiia.

The impact that the neoliberal “reforms” of the Kiev government will have on the majority of the population east and west will alienate workers and youth who presently support them or are neutral in the present struggle. If the resistance forces in the east make plain their dedication to a united, all-Ukrainian struggle in defence of the jobs and services of working people, which the Manifesto does indeed envisage, then there is the potential for a joint struggle against the oligarchs and nationalists.

Conclusion

So what do we think is the goal and the programme that can win the civil war against the right-wing nationalists, fascists and oligarchs? We outline this in our draft action programme below. Its axes are the following:

- The struggle against the neoliberal-oligarch government, its armies and its fascist gangs is a also fight against capitalism, not only Ukrainian but North American, European and Russian and against either of the contending imperialist power blocks.
- The only class that can lead this struggle is the Ukrainian working class aided by workers in Europe and internationally.
- This revolution is not simply a “people’s revolution” or a “democratic revolution”; it is not merely “socially oriented” or “socially just” it must be a social revolution that uproots capitalism itself.
- This revolution must therefore culminate not just in “people’s power”, whatever that is understood to be, but in workers’ power, that is, the rule of councils of delegates who are democratically elected and recallable by workers in their workplaces and communities.
- This revolution must not only transcend the limits of capitalist democracy, and a social welfare state, and become a socialist revolution; it must become the spark that ignites an international revolution, for, if the history of Stalinism shows anything, it shows that it is impossible to build socialism in one country.

LINKS

Draft Action Programme for Ukraine:

<http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/draft-action-programme-ukraine>

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- 3 Georgi Dimitrov, as General Secretary of the Communist International, moved the resolution “The People’s Front Against Fascism and War” at the 7th Congress in 1935.

The resurrection of Russian Imperialism

The restoration of capitalism after the collapse of the USSR posed the questions - what kind of capitalist state was the new Russia, and what was its role in the imperialist system. This resolution, passed by the International Executive Committee of the LFI in June 2014 examines the development of Russia's economy and its relations with the West and the other former USSR countries to answer these questions

IN CHARACTERISING RUSSIA as an imperialist power, we base our analysis on Lenin's theoretical model of imperialism as the "highest stage of capitalism". Within this simple formulation lies a rich and complex elaboration of Marx's own analysis of capitalism. Imperialism is the highest stage because the process of monopolisation has led to its domination by finance capital, which is the closest concrete expression possible of the abstract concept of capital itself: accumulated value that is available for investment anywhere and in any sphere of the economy because it is itself not tied to any specific sector or, indeed, territory. It is, so to speak, the "purest" form of actually existing capital; there cannot be a "higher" form of capital.

Inherently, imperialism is a global system, because that is the highest possible development of capitalism, which has always been an international system but only came to dominate the entire world in this epoch.

Clearly, there can be no expansion beyond a global system, which is why Lenin concluded that, insofar as there was further capitalist development in the imperialist epoch, it would entail the re-division of the world between the rival imperialisms or "Great Powers" as they were often called at that time.

The synonymous use of "imperialism", "Great Powers" and "imperialists" was, in Lenin's time, and is now of particular importance in assessing the character of Russia. Confusion has arisen because "imperialism" can be used to denote either a particular state, that is, a Great Power, or the totality of the global system. As a result, many have assumed that Lenin's famous five-point list of the defining features of the global system can serve as a checklist of

the features that an individual power must exhibit in order to qualify as an "imperialist" state. This is wrong. Lenin himself emphasised, in his preface to the French and German editions in 1920, that what he presented in his pamphlet was a "composite picture" of imperialism as a totality, not a description of any one specific imperialist power. That this must be the case is immediately obvious as soon as one considers the implications of his inclusion of Tsarist Russia among the "imperialist powers".

Russia, at that time, certainly lacked several of the supposedly defining features of an "imperialism"; its own capitalist development was still weak and had not yet transformed itself into finance capital; far from exporting capital, Russia was a major importer of foreign capital while being a major exporter of commodities, primarily foodstuffs, which Lenin said declined in importance within imperialism. Clearly, the aspect of the "composite picture" that predominated in Russia was the ability to take part in the fifth of Lenin's features, the territorial division of the world.

At the same time, that ability did not exist independently of Russia's internal economic development. As Trotsky had made clear in his own account of the unique pattern of Russian history, the country's relationship to other powers had a crucial impact; the need to establish and maintain a strong state machine resulted in a greater state involvement in economic modernisation and a correspondingly weaker role for a national bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, the economic measures adopted by the Tsarist state were those of the imperialist epoch, particularly the large-scale industrial centres characteristic of monopolies.



Many of these considerations retain their full force and applicability today when we assess the character of contemporary Russia. As we shall see, since the collapse of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state, the interactions between Russia's international role and status and its internal development, economic, social and political, show many parallels and analogies to its earlier history. Of course, the world itself is a very different place now but we remain in the epoch of imperialism, an epoch in which the contradictions between nationally-based capitals and the dynamics of the global economy drive today's Great Powers into rivalry and, ultimately, conflict. Within that, Russia is guaranteed to be a principal protagonist and revolutionaries, therefore, must have a clear understanding of its character if they are to develop a strategy for a politically independent working class party that can oppose all imperialist powers while taking advantage of the conflicts between them.

Russia's role in the world order

Russia re-emerged as an independent state from the collapse of the Soviet Union. This collapse was the consequence of two dynamics in particular. The decisive one was the destruction of the degenerated workers' state as the result of the growing pressure of US imperialism on its stagnating economy in the 1980s and the decision of the main forces of the Stalinist bureaucracy to complete the task it had begun in the counter-revolution in the 1920s. The second was the creation of national states out of the former Union. Some of these were based on a previous existence as a state or a nation or on a historic national struggle against Great Russian domination, which had been continued by the Stalinist bureaucracy, as was the case for the Baltic states; others, such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, came into existence for the first time or did not relate to a "people" or a patriotic movement, as in Moldova.

These two aspects are connected. Even though Great Russian domination existed to a certain extent within the USSR, the Stalinist bureaucracy as such was not nationally Russian. However, the bourgeoisie is by definition a national

class. So to maintain the borders of the USSR as a capitalist state would have meant a much stronger national oppression against the non-Russian republics than before. This was an impossible task in a country where a ruling class had yet to be formed.

Because Russia, and Slavic Russians had always played a dominant role in the Soviet Union, in the disintegration process it, and they inherited "superpower" status, although one that had just been defeated. This would have been a heavy burden for any ruling class but in Russia such a class did not exist; the Russian bourgeoisie had still to be created.

In the aftermath of restoration, Russia's rulers therefore had the task, like their Tsarist predecessors, of establishing and then maintaining the country's role in the world. Not to fight to become (again) and remain an imperialist country would have meant degradation to the status of a semi-colony. This would almost certainly have led to disintegration under the pressure of foreign forces, primarily the imperialist powers, and the dissolution of the large military apparatus and state bureaucracy.¹

Their task has been made all the more difficult by a historical crisis of capitalism. The leading imperialist force, the USA has lost ground; Germany's ambitions to rival the US, backed up by a homogenised EU, have been set back as the EU was driven deeper into crisis by the very means that the German government had taken to strengthen itself in the crisis; China has emerged as a leading manufacturer, gaining ground not only at the expense of the EU and Japan but even of the USA, and Japan has been forced to reconsider all its options if it is not to be marginalised.

On the economic front, Russia cannot go on forever relying on the extraction of oil, gas and minerals, even if, at the moment, this guarantees a high export rate and even an export surplus higher than that of China. Ultimately, it would mean restricting itself to the role of a semi-colony, albeit a very large one. The challenges are very great, perhaps insurmountable; competing in industry, that is, in the production of surplus value, would require Russian manufacturing to be more effective than Japanese or German production or sup-

plying cheaper labour than China. To compete in finance would mean being strong enough to make others provide credit at favourable rates or to accept credits on Russia's terms. Also no easy task.

The very least that Russia has to achieve is to establish an industry that is capable of serving the domestic market (plus the former USSR republics as its backyard³). Even though the products might not be competitive on the world market, Russia's military and political strength could probably protect such a market to a certain degree. To date, however, the Russian bourgeoisie has proven incapable of achieving even this.

On the other hand, other imperialist states are not willing to let Russia take a strong position in the imperialist world order. The US and EU mainly want their share of the profits, especially from oil and gas, and they want to contain Russia's military power, which is the principal base of its political and diplomatic strength in the world. However, Russia's new imperialist neighbour, China, faces many of the same challenges at the international level, so a potential exists for a rival bloc.

This, then, is the context of the world in which Russia's rulers, Russian capitalism, and Russian capitalists have to act and within which we have to understand Russia's development.

The Russian bourgeoisie

The character of the Russian bourgeoisie is determined by historic facts:

- Russia was already a Great Power when capitalism became the dominant economic system (social relation) in the country, but the Russian bourgeoisie was excluded from political power.
- Subsequently, the Russian bourgeoisie was liquidated in the Great Revolution and ceased to exist for some 70 years.
- Therefore it had, effectively, to be created anew from 1990 onwards.

Two things can be concluded from this; the Russian bourgeoisie is extremely weak especially as the ruling class of an imperialist country; it is different from all other imperialist bourgeoisies.

The Russian bourgeoisie today lacks historical continuity as a class. It was in large part formed from certain sectors of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Trotsky already predicted this: "If... a bourgeois party were to overthrow the ruling Soviet caste, it would find no small number of ready servants among the present bureaucrats, administrators, technicians, directors, party secretaries and privileged upper circles in general."⁴

The most dynamic force in the "transition process", which started in the late 1980s with Gorbachov's *perestroika*, was quite naturally the sector of the bureaucracy associated with economic administration. They had direct, decision-making control over the production of wealth. Of course, the bureaucracy as a whole was very experienced at channelling parts of the social property into its own hands, even if this involved conflict within its own ranks, but the economic administration, that is, the company directors, sat at the source.⁵

A second component with a strong ambition to elevate itself into a ruling class, were parts of the intelligentsia⁶, which can be considered as a subordinated stratum within the bureaucracy. Generally forced to behave, and to be treated as workers, certain professions that in most countries form the wage earning middle classes felt that they could do better than serving the old, crisis-ridden system. The economic stagnation of the 1980s, and a bureaucracy less and less able to chart any way forward, brought movement into these layers. Just as the left of the intelligentsia

started to come out for civic democratic rights, the right wing of the intelligentsia started to set its sights on a "market economy". There was less need for this sector to publicise itself because this tendency was perfectly expressed by stronger forces within the Stalinist bureaucracy⁷ around Gorbachev and close ties existed between these two strata.

The third component was the criminal scene that had emerged from the black markets and was based also in the *gulags*. Its role was, of course, a necessary complement to the inability of the Stalinist bureaucracy to satisfy the needs of the people or, indeed, the whole of the bureaucracy either. Trotsky described this layer in *Revolution Betrayed*. During the restoration process, there was some argument among political and economic strategists over whether criminal capital should be legalised. Especially the western advisers insisted that it should, claiming that during Soviet times the black market was the only place where entrepreneurial abilities could be developed.⁸ This, of course, does not now keep western "democratic" capitalists or politicians from accusing their Russian counterparts of roughness, criminal methods and "oligarchism"⁹, features that do have a material base in the specific way in which state assets were plundered and privatised but which already had a long tradition in this third component.

The Russian bourgeoisie in history

The difficulties involved in developing a new ruling class in Russia out of these elements can be compared to those of the Russian bourgeoisie as it struggled to become a dominant factor prior to 1917. It had been unable to develop its own ideology or religion which could express its will to become the ruling class. Far from being able to overthrow the autocratic system, the Russian bourgeoisie effectively gave up all attacks on the Tsarist regime after the unsuccessful "Decembrist"¹⁰ upheaval of 1825. As a class they feared the potential revolt of the exploited classes more than they desired to take over political power and responsibility. In 1905 and 1917, it was only the proletariat which attacked the Tsarist autocracy. The bourgeoisie was unable either to formulate a possible compromise with the Tsar or to use the power that the February Revolution handed it. The Russian bourgeoisie has a tradition as a loser.

When Lenin predicted that the chain of world imperialism would break at its weakest point, he not only expressed his view of capitalism as a world system, he also said something about the relationship between Russia's economic weakness and its relationship to the system as a whole.

Trotsky describes this historic weakness, which had its origin in a combination of specific national factors and capitalism as a world system, with the following words:

"The meagreness not only of Russian feudalism, but of all the old Russian history, finds its most depressing expression in the absence of real mediaeval cities as centres of commerce and craft. Handicraft did not succeed in Russia in separating itself from agriculture, but preserved its character of home industry. The old Russian cities were commercial, administrative, military and manorial; centres of consumption, consequently, not of production. Even Novgorod, similar to Hansa and not subdued by the Tartars, was only a commercial, and not an industrial city. True, the distribution of the peasant industries over various districts created a demand for trade mediation on a large scale. But nomad traders could not possibly occupy that place in social life which belonged in the West to the craft-guild and merchant-industrial petty and middle bourgeoisie, inseparably bound up with its peasant environment. The chief roads of Russian trade, moreover, led across the border, thus, from time immemorial, giving the leadership to foreign commercial capital, and



Leon Trotsky characterised the Russian bourgeoisie as politically impotent, imbued with philosophical poverty and quarantined in fear

imparting a semi-colonial character to the whole process, in which the Russian trader was a mediator between the Western cities and the Russian villages. This kind of economic relation developed further during the epoch of Russian capitalism and found its extreme expression in the imperialist war.

"The insignificance of the Russian cities, which more than anything else promoted the development of an Asiatic state, also made impossible a Reformation, that is, a replacement of the feudal-bureaucratic orthodoxy by some sort of modernised kind of Christianity adapted to the demands of a bourgeois society. The struggle against the state church did not go farther than the creation of peasant sects, the faction of the Old Believers being the most powerful among them."¹¹

He also compared the Russian bourgeoisie with its European brothers: "The English and French bourgeoisie created a new society in their own image. The Germans came later, and they were compelled to live for a long time on the pale gruel of philosophy. The Germans invented the phrase "Weltanschauung" which does not exist in English or French. While these nations were creating a new world, the Germans were thinking one up. But the German bourgeoisie, although poor in political activity, created the classical philosophy, and that is no small achievement. Russia came much later. To be sure, she translated the German phrase "Weltanschauung" into Russian, and that with several variations, but this only the more clearly exposed both her political impotence and her deadly philosophical poverty. She imported ideas as well as machines, establishing high tariffs for the latter, and for the former a quarantine of fear."¹²

Against the background of this heritage, industry was developed in a shorter time and on a more concentrated scale. As the whole historic epoch of craft production was skipped, industry was quickly developed in large factories

without a wider base of manufacturing and little workshops. This was accomplished in large measure with foreign credits. This also made the Russian bourgeoisie weaker in relation both to its economic base and to other Imperialists. It also produced an industrial proletariat directly from peasantry without a tradition in crafts and guilds. This made the bourgeoisie relatively weak in relation to the proletariat. Taken together, these factors made it a class with no self-confidence.

The new Russian bourgeoisie, therefore, does not have much to reclaim from history. It has nothing positive to learn from its historic precedents, while the proletariat, on the other hand, has a great deal. If the Russian bourgeoisie could not overcome its weaknesses in 1917, why should it be able to overcome them after 1990? The only material fact that has changed is the wealth of the modern Russian capitalists, which is definitely much larger than in 1917. All capitalist wealth is taken in the end from the proletariat but, if this is done through the organisation of surplus production, capitalists appear as the "producers". Today's Russian bourgeoisie does not appear to be so much a "producing class" as an "appropriating class".

The same applies to the military power. Tsarist Russia's military strength lay in the great number of soldiers and the vast dimensions of the country, which forced even Napoleon, who had beaten all the others, to retreat. In 1905, Russia lost against Japan and Turkey. In 1917, it lost against the Central Powers, Germany, Austria and Romania, with Germany only acting with less than half of its forces. Nowadays, Russian military power is based on the wealth, the knowledge and the technique developed under bureaucratic command in the degenerated workers' state, now many decades ago.

The Russian bourgeoisie has no bourgeois leader or hero to connect to the victory of the "Great Patriotic War" as the Stalinists called it. The era in world history when Russia, as the main component of the USSR, had its greatest role in the global arena was an era in which the Russian bourgeoisie did not exist.

The Stalinist bureaucracy and the Russian bourgeoisie

The October Revolution had taken the power from the bourgeoisie, but of course in the transitional period that followed, bourgeois elements survived as traders or kulaks. The New Economic Policy, NEP, even had to support this stratum again. With the counter-revolutionary destruction of the Communist Party as a revolutionary party after Lenin's death, it was true that bourgeois elements could enter the Party, but the necessary material base for their persistence as a class, private property in the means of production, was gone.

This was the situation that Trotsky was later to characterise as a "degenerated workers' state", rejecting the argument that the political counter-revolution by which the Stalin faction eliminated all the means by which the working class could have exercised political power constituted a social counter-revolution that had eliminated all of the gains made by the revolution, as well as the official line that the Soviet Union was advancing towards socialism. In his analysis, he characterised the bureaucracy as "the agent of imperialism within the workers' state" meaning not that it took orders from imperialist powers but that its primary objective, the eradication of all vestiges of the revolutionary working class movement, was also the primary objective of the imperialists.

On a global scale, the main task of the Stalinist bureaucracy was to prevent the world revolution. As well as stopping any revolutionary progress within the Soviet Union, it also misled all revolutionary upheavals globally, by control-



1998: Rouble goes in freefall

ling and disorienting the fighting masses. After the defeat of German imperialism in 1945, it ensured the defeat of all potentially revolutionary developments in the areas under its control by first restoring a functioning bourgeois state and, later, under pressure from the Western imperialists, imposed essentially its own forms of bureaucratic rule.

In the continued suppression of the workers in the USSR, the Stalinist bureaucracy continued to act not only in the interests of global capital but also as an “agent of the Russian bourgeoisie” in absentia.¹³

As it was this agent of imperialism that organised and completed the counter-revolution that created the conditions for the rebirth of a Russian bourgeoisie, we should recognise that world imperialism played a role, as the midwife, but a midwife who, while assisting at the birth, did not want the new child to grow too strong.

The collapse of the Soviet Union as a workers’ state, albeit a counter-revolutionary and degenerated one, gave the imperialists, with the US as front runner, every opportunity to equip the fledgling bourgeoisie with the fully developed political ideology of neoliberalism. Of course, the ideology alone was not sufficient, but it legitimised an entire political programme which, crucially, centred on the privatisation of all the state assets produced under planning. Unsurprisingly, this wholesale plunder of social property was accompanied by bribery, nepotism, corruption and murder. “The scale of the subsidy to the private sector can be gauged from the fact that the privatisations yielded the government less than 5 per cent of the market price of its own property.”¹⁴

This all was done with the aim of creating a possessing class that would defend the new property relations.¹⁵ ¹⁶ The new class learned quickly how to appropriate and how to be possessive, but it did not learn how to behave as a ruling class. In Marx’s words, it was a “class in itself” but not a “class for itself”.¹⁷

As such, it did not develop a plan for the future of the country. It exploited it in the manner of a foreign plunderer of occupied territories, from which it might be expelled at any

moment. The members of this class quickly felt more at home in London, St. Moritz and Baden-Baden; the Russian bourgeoisie mistrusted its own leadership so much that it withdrew as much capital as possible from the country.

The first decade of restoration

The wild privatisation frenzy led to the appearance of “oligarchs”, that is, people who owned huge amounts of capital and controlled it through “clans” of friends and relatives, exerting direct pressure on the state to pursue their personal interests. At the same time, these clans stood in a fierce competition to each other.

As a result, the country fell into a pitiful state; life expectancy fell by more than 5 years within a space 5 years. The average life expectancy of men fell from 63.8 years in 1990 to 57.6 years in 1994.

The first wave of privatisation led to a sharp decline in production, growing social differentiation within the population and a dramatic reduction in wages; up to the year 2000, they declined steadily: between 1991 and 1992, by 33 per cent, and in the following three years by a further 33 per cent. By 2000, real wages were 2.3 times less than in 1991.¹⁸ Living standards obviously fell dramatically and people were forced to live from whatever savings they might have, thereby transferring that reserve of social resources to the oligarchs as well.

Unemployment rose to 13 per cent¹⁹, a relatively smaller number compared to other restoration countries. The reason for this apparent anomaly was that many workers formally kept their jobs, on much reduced hours because lay-offs were prohibited by law at that time. However, workers received their wages according to the reduced working hours²⁰ and often the payment of wages was delayed.

This development culminated in the crisis of 1997-98.²¹ Different groups of capitalists were deeply engaged in fighting each other. None of them was paying taxes and state finances broke down. GDP had fallen by about 40 per cent. Yeltsin replaced Chernomyrdin with Kirilenko as prime minister, only to sack him five months later for ineffectiveness. After Chernomyrdin was briefly re-installed, Primakov became prime minister.

The IMF then intervened, demanding cuts in public spending as the pre-condition for credit. The resistance of the State Duma was broken by repeated threats from the IMF not to pay the money, until the crisis was resolved by the implementation of the cuts and the devaluation of the rouble.

The working class had to pay the bill in several ways: Wage-cuts and non-payment of wages, devaluation of wages and savings, loss of jobs, cuts in the social welfare system. However, it did not remain silent: there were strikes by the miners and public employees such as teachers, medical personnel, soldiers and pensioners. Thus, it was the working-class, despite the consequences of the historic defeat of 1990, that finally threatened the survival of the government.

The economic crisis of 1998 also severely hit economic relations with the other former SU-republics. The separatism in Chechnya showed that Russia was starting to lose its capacity to regulate and dominate the region.

The rise of Bonapartism

In this situation, forces within the state apparatus took the initiative. They stopped the undermining of the state in favour of the “market”, re-established a degree of state control over the economy and re-enforced the repressive functions of the state. Of course, these forces also represented a faction of the bourgeoisie and it is no surprise that they had their roots in a special wing of the bureaucracy; not those

who got the biggest slice of the cake, but those trained to keep an eye on the question of control. Not so much the “economic” layer as the “security” layer.²²

This can only be understood as the state acting as the ideal “general capitalist”. Of course, this coup had to be undertaken in the name of the country, the people and even the working-class, to whom some benefits had to be delivered. This was, and is, the classical role of Bonapartism and this Bonaparte’s name is Putin.

As a general rule, Bonapartism is possible (and necessary) in a situation where there exists a stalemate in the class struggle. A single person can then seem to stand above the class struggle and be independent of the classes. This generally goes together with populism.

In fact, Putin undertook certain hard measures against the bourgeoisie or, rather, against certain sectors of it. The political goal was to give the Russian bourgeoisie a leadership, to unify it politically, hence the name of his party, “United Russia” and to make it fit for its task.²³ The political means for that was to employ the state bureaucracy for this task.

Does the characterisation of Bonapartism mean that the working class was, or is, strong enough to fight the bourgeoisie to a standstill? Not directly, it is better understood as a potential opponent, waiting in the wings as it were, should the bourgeoisie utterly fail to fulfil its task. That task was primarily to secure a place in the imperialist world order and to reconfigure the Russian economy and, therefore, society accordingly. The security sector of the state apparatus recognised that the bourgeoisie was coming perilously close to such utter failure because it was itself divided and paralysed. Since it had proved itself unable to constitute a leadership through economic competition or democratic processes, it had to be given one by the coup of one of its components. An example had to be made of certain capitalists, such as Chodorkovsky, who were capable of challenging Putin. Thus it was the political impotence of the bourgeoisie, its inability to take a leading role in the class struggle or to understand the results of its actions correctly and the consequent danger of working class rebellion that created the need for a Bonaparte.

The second decade of restoration

Like most Bonapartes, Putin relies politically on populism, in his case combining Russian/Slavic/Orthodox chauvinism with male hetero chauvinism. To establish his Bonapartist system, Putin had, above all, to complete two tasks: re-centralising the state and forcing the oligarchs to accept the primacy of politics and their subordination to the state. The Russian Federation consisted of 85 “federal subjects”, that is, republics, autonomous regions, oblasts etc. Under Yeltsin, these had been virtually privatised under the control of local or regional oligarchs who had often ceased to pay any revenues to the central state or even developed secessionist tendencies, as in the Caucasus Region. Putin declared a “vertical power” and brought these regional structures again under the more central control of the Kremlin. The governors of the regions were no longer to be elected by the regional parliaments but only proposed; the final decision was to be the President’s.

Putin then went on to eliminate, and largely expropriate, several oligarchs: Gussinsky, Beresovsky and Khodorkovsky. In general, the bourgeoisie has had to accept that the state bureaucracy has to be financed and that taxes have to be paid to run the state.

To control the working class and integrate it into the state, Putin directed a certain part of the GDP to pensions and wages. From 2000 to 2010, wages rose by 142 per cent, pensions by 231 per cent²⁴ although, of course, from an all-

time lowest standard. This was financed through the super-profits from oil and gas. Putin also reformed “tripartism”, that is, the relationship between employers, trade unions and the state, formally recognising trade unions. The traditional, and tame, bureaucratically controlled, trade unions have been allowed to continue, but the state deals with independent trade unions and strikes with a heavy hand.²⁵

Since 2000, the economy has stabilised and is growing. The political weight of the Russian Federation on the global level has increased and the internal opposition, although it took to the streets again in 2012, has effectively been silenced. This regime is not at all a welfare state as some reformists make believe. Re-nationalisation only meant that the state owns shares but the companies are still run under capitalist profit rules. Privatisation is continued.

The “Putin system” is not a personal construct but an expression of the state of the Russian bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisies in imperialist countries have parties, employers’ associations and think tanks, universities, institutes and foundations. The Russian bourgeoisie has a state administration and bureaucracy and its leader. This administration dominates the President’s Party. The other bourgeois parties are either also tied to the state²⁶ or are recognisably agents of foreign capital.²⁷ The employers’ association²⁸, which plays a role only in the annual meeting of the tripartite commission²⁹, is run by state bureaucrats. Russian oligarchs do not invest in research institutes but in football clubs. Universities do not feel so much an obligation to capital as to the state bureaucracy.

So, what we see in Russia is more than the usual relationship of an imperialist bourgeoisie to its state. Usually, the different factions of capital compete in influencing political decisions. They try to implement certain laws, install certain politicians. In Russia, the state installs the managers, just as it staffs the employers’ association. The role of the state as the “ideal collective capitalist” has reached a higher level.

The Bonapartist regime cannot resolve all contradictions and is creating new ones.

The working class

The working class of what was the Soviet Union has undoubtedly suffered a historic defeat. The counterrevolution that exterminated its cadres and abolished the Bolshevik Party as a revolutionary workers’ party happened in the twenties of last century, but it was not completed until Gorbachev’s Perestroika. Until then, the working class still had achievements such as job security, stable income, free medical treatment, a very high level of free education and social recognition. This has now been largely destroyed and this alone can be seen as a historic defeat. But the strategic defeat, of course, lies in the restoration of capitalist ownership and the production of surplus value.

The working class is still huge in numbers, although it has shrunk. It is hard to find figures, because the Stalinist bureaucracy counted themselves as members of the working class and the statistics of the bourgeois state do not talk about classes. In addition the workers in a degenerated workers’ state are something different from surplus value producing workers.

The “workable part of the population” is given as around 75 to 77 million people and we can gain some idea of how it has been recomposed since 1990 by considering the restructuring of the economy of the Russian Federation since then.

From Table 1 of “production indices” it is clear that certain industries have never recovered since 1991: textiles, leather and wood but also machinery and equipment and the manufacturing of transport equipment, which would include cars, HGVs and trains. The decline in the production of machinery

Table 1. PRODUCTION INDICES BY ECONOMIC ACTIVITY (1991=100)

| | 1992 | 2000 | 2005 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Mining and quarrying | 88.2 | 74.3 | 99.1 | 105.2 | 105.6 | 105.0 | 108.8 | 110.8 | 112.0 |
| Extraction of energy, producing minerals | 94.7 | 80.7 | 111.4 | 117.4 | 117.6 | 118.0 | 121.7 | 123.3 | 124.8 |
| Extraction of minerals except energy producing minerals | 71.0 | 60.1 | 62.2 | 67.4 | 68.2 | 63.1 | 67.7 | 71.0 | 71.6 |
| Manufacturing | 81.8 | 50.9 | 68.9 | 82.5 | 82.9 | 70.3 | 78.6 | 83.8 | 87.2 |
| Manufacture of food products, including beverages and tobacco | 80.0 | 54.6 | 75.2 | 86.6 | 88.3 | 87.7 | 92.5 | 93.4 | 98.2 |
| Manufacture of textiles and textile products | 71.9 | 23.4 | 24.8 | 27.6 | 26.1 | 21.9 | 24.5 | 25.1 | 24.6 |
| Manufacture of leather, leather products and footwear | 78.0 | 15.3 | 21.5 | 26.9 | 26.8 | 26.7 | 31.7 | 34.5 | 31.0 |
| Manufacture of wood and wood products | 78.7 | 37.4 | 48.5 | 54.3 | 54.2 | 43.0 | 47.9 | 49.8 | 51.4 |
| Manufacture of pulp, paper and paper products; publishing and printing | 88.0 | 81.1 | 108.7 | 125.6 | 126.0 | 107.9 | 114.3 | 116.4 | 118.8 |
| Manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products | 82.8 | 60.2 | 70.8 | 77.5 | 79.7 | 79.2 | 83.2 | 85.6 | 87.5 |
| Manufacture of chemical products | 79.0 | 69.7 | 81.9 | 91.4 | 87.2 | 81.2 | 93.0 | 97.8 | 99.1 |
| Manufacture of rubber and plastic products | 79.5 | 52.5 | 74.5 | 113.2 | 139.0 | 121.5 | 147.6 | 166.9 | 179.2 |
| Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products | 80.9 | 40.3 | 51.7 | 63.9 | 62.0 | 45.0 | 49.8 | 54.4 | 57.5 |
| Manufacture of basic metals and fabricated metal products | 82.3 | 66.8 | 87.5 | 100.3 | 98.1 | 83.7 | 94.0 | 96.8 | 101.1 |
| Manufacture of machinery and equipment | 84.4 | 32.3 | 44.9 | 63.6 | 63.3 | 43.3 | 48.6 | 53.2 | 53.5 |
| Manufacture of electrical, electronic and optical equipment | 79.8 | 45.2 | 116.1 | 148.1 | 137.1 | 93.0 | 114.2 | 120.0 | 125.1 |
| Manufacture of transport equipment | 85.3 | 53.1 | 52.7 | 59.4 | 59.7 | 37.5 | 49.6 | 61.7 | 69.6 |
| Other manufacturing | 91.2 | 60.3 | 90.2 | 103.6 | 101.9 | 80.8 | 95.1 | 99.3 | 98.4 |
| Electricity, gas and water supply | 95.3 | 76.9 | 86.1 | 88.5 | 89.0 | 85.6 | 89.1 | 89.2 | 90.2 |

Data is given with account to adjustment to informal activities.³⁰

also indicates how dependent Russia is today on imported production equipment. On the other hand, the production in mining has risen, as has the production in electrical equipment and plastics, sectors that were underdeveloped under Stalinism. Still, we can assume that there has been a serious shift from employment in “classical” workplaces in heavy and light industry towards other workplaces and a small shift within the industrial sector towards modern industries such as plastics and electronics. Any rationalisation must be added to this.

If we look at the development of those sectors that were hard hit in 1990, we can see that some of them have remained at that low level while others have recovered but not reached the old figures. This shows that a certain amount of investment has taken place. This is most obvious in the “manufacture of transport equipment”. After a more or less steady decline till 2007 to 37.5 per cent of the production of 1990, it has risen to 69.6 per cent in 2012. This is probably largely connected to foreign capital, but in any case it is not possible without a strong rise in employment. The

same is true to a lesser extent for the production of food, beverages and tobacco, which was down to 54.6 per cent in 2000 and has steadily built up to 98.2 per cent in 2012.

So, industrial production, as covered in Table 2, still makes up a large part of the Russian economy. Very likely we will find a younger workforce in the new or newly built industries such as plastics, electronics and the car industry. Perhaps also in the food industry, but as this probably mostly located in rural areas, it is not so central in the regeneration of the working class.

So manufacturing, extraction of raw materials, production of living necessities and construction make up about 35 per cent of the GDP. The rise of retail, transport and hotels as main components of the “third” sector to about 30 per cent of GDP shows where the workforce went. It is, therefore, in this sector, which also includes Information Technology, transport and logistics, that we will find a “new” working class. There was also, of course, a move towards banking and other financial sectors, of which only a small part can be considered as working class.

Table 2 Production of GDP *at current prices; billion roubles

| | 2011 | | | | | | | 2012 |
|--|---------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|----------|------------|---------|
| | Year | I quarter | II quarter | III quarter | IV quarter | 9 months | IV quarter | Year |
| Gross domestic product at market prices | 55799.6 | 13801.8 | 15013.4 | 28815.2 | 16349.5 | 45164.7 | 17434.3 | 62599.1 |
| Gross value added by economic activity (at basic prices) | 47505.5 | 11700.4 | 12691.6 | 24392.0 | 14022.9 | 38414.9 | 14869.6 | 53264.5 |
| Of which: | 1973.5 | 208.8 | 340.9 | 549.6 | 826.3 | 1375.9 | 576.0 | 1952.0 |
| Agriculture, hunting, forestry | | | | | | | | |
| Fishing | 98.9 | 28.8 | 28.5 | 57.2 | 26.4 | 83.6 | 26.3 | 108.9 |
| Mining and quarrying | 5157.3 | 1393.0 | 1363.3 | 2756.3 | 1526.7 | 4280.0 | 1521.4 | 5801.4 |
| Manufacturing | 7385.5 | 1762.1 | 1966.4 | 3728.5 | 2103.5 | 5832.0 | 2259.7 | 8091.7 |
| Electricity, gas and water supply | 1814.5 | 539.0 | 383.6 | 922.6 | 377.3 | 1299.9 | 545.9 | 1845.8 |
| Construction | 3101.8 | 510.0 | 796.3 | 1306.3 | 968.0 | 2274.3 | 1170.6 | 3445.0 |
| Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods | 9329.7 | 2371.9 | 2533.3 | 4906.2 | 2686.5 | 7591.7 | 2922.4 | 10514.1 |
| Hotels and restaurants | 462.0 | 109.0 | 125.4 | 232.4 | 136.6 | 369.0 | 145.3 | 514.3 |
| Transport, storage and communications | 3971.5 | 940.7 | 1100.2 | 2040.9 | 1173.1 | 3214.0 | 1136.6 | 4350.6 |
| Financial intermediation | 1956.0 | 543.1 | 554.2 | 1097.3 | 589.3 | 1686.5 | 641.9 | 2325.5 |
| Real estate, renting and business activities | 5645.8 | 1366.2 | 1515.3 | 2880.4 | 1575.3 | 4455.8 | 1829.8 | 6266.6 |
| Public administration and defence; compulsory social security | 2672.6 | 656.8 | 870.5 | 1727.2 | 839.7 | 2616.9 | 903.9 | 3520.8 |
| Education | 1386.3 | 381.6 | 382.6 | 764.2 | 405.7 | 1169.9 | 414.1 | 1584.0 |
| Health and social work | 1773.0 | 480.5 | 516.1 | 996.5 | 534.5 | 1531.1 | 550.8 | 2081.9 |
| Other community, social and personal service activities | 776.9 | 210.1 | 217.3 | 427.3 | 206.7 | 634.0 | 225.9 | 860.0 |
| Household activities | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Net taxes on goods | 8294.1 | 2101.4 | 2321.7 | 4428.2 | 2326.7 | 6749.8 | 2664.7 | 9314.5 |

Thirdly, we have to look at those layers that have been degraded by privatisation. These are, as in most countries of the world, the education and health sectors. In 2011, a “reform” in the shape of a new “Law of commercialisation of the budgetary sphere”³¹ changed the legal status of state and municipal organisations. Its formal aim was to provide a rationale for the redistribution of financial means within this sphere, but the actual purpose was to put education, medicine and culture on a commercial basis. It meant that municipal schools, hospitals and cultural institutions would not get direct finance from the state anymore. Although regional governments can support them, there is no obligation. While wages of the personnel are still paid by the state, the other necessities have to be covered from their own “commercial” activities, like renting out accommodation, requiring payment for some lessons or services etc. Most of the public administration itself has not yet been touched because of the role of the state in the Bonapartist regime.

The privatisation of agriculture has produced a new land question, although the privatisation process was slower than in industry. “Communal property” still exists as it is necessary for stability, but it is disappearing. This results in great capitalist latifundia (Eko-invest) and a large rural population dependent on small plots of land, whether owned or rented, and using inefficient methods to eke out a low standard of living. The average monthly wage in agriculture in 2012 was R14,017, only two-thirds of that in food processing (R21,074) and an even smaller proportion of the average income of R26,822.³²

The rural population in general has suffered a large setback. The closure of light industry hit the small towns harder than the large ones. No new factories have opened or will open, except for a few in food processing. The rationalisation in agriculture has already driven many out of work and more job losses are likely. Public transport has been cut in the country districts and cultural centres are

Table 3. Accrued average monthly nominal wages of employees of organisations by economic activity (roubles)

| | 2000 | 2005 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 |
|--|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Total in the economy | 2228 | 3555 | 13693 | 17290 | 18638 | 20952 | 23369 | 26822 |
| Agriculture, hunting and forestry | 385 | 3646 | 5144 | 3475 | 9619 | 10668 | 12464 | 14017 |
| Fishing | 2846 | 10234 | 14797 | 19499 | 22914 | 23782 | 25940 | 28942 |
| Mining and quarrying | 5940 | 19727 | 28108 | 33206 | 35363 | 39895 | 45132 | 50483 |
| Mining of energy producing minerals | 6985 | 23456 | 33276 | 39051 | 41568 | 46271 | 51588 | 57267 |
| Mining except of energy producing minerals | 4000 | 13176 | 19093 | 22937 | 24064 | 28306 | 33580 | 38311 |
| Manufacturing | 2365 | 3421 | 12879 | 16050 | 16583 | 19078 | 21781 | 24480 |
| Manufacture of food products, including beverages, and tobacco | 2183 | 7304 | 11069 | 13930 | 15653 | 17317 | 19094 | 21074 |
| Manufacture of textiles and textile products | 1215 | 3986 | 5590 | 3454 | 9021 | 10302 | 11004 | 12557 |
| Manufacture of leather, leather products and footwear | 1348 | 4695 | 7537 | 9522 | 10073 | 11346 | 12351 | 12926 |
| Manufacture of wood and wood products | 1739 | 5895 | 8816 | 11301 | 10947 | 12720 | 13942 | 15561 |
| Manufacture of pulp, paper and paper products; publishing and printing | 2737 | 9419 | 13792 | 17632 | 17707 | 20104 | 23710 | 25509 |
| Manufacture of coke and refined petroleum products | 4916 | 19397 | 28565 | 34913 | 37964 | 41563 | 48463 | 56576 |
| Manufacture of chemical products | 2755 | 9928 | 14616 | 18220 | 19429 | 22229 | 25583 | 28611 |
| Manufacture of rubber and plastics products | 2140 | 5879 | 11083 | 13464 | 13851 | 15766 | 17713 | 19198 |
| Manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products | 2182 | 7922 | 13193 | 16372 | 16054 | 18118 | 20518 | 23281 |
| Manufacture of basic metals and fabricated metal products | 3855 | 10261 | 14991 | 18171 | 17946 | 21552 | 23887 | 27066 |
| Manufacture of machinery and equipment | 1975 | 3380 | 13480 | 16940 | 17010 | 20103 | 22778 | 25920 |
| Manufacture of electrical, electronic and optical equipment | 2004 | 3219 | 13114 | 16609 | 17360 | 20178 | 23375 | 26179 |
| Manufacture of transport equipment | 2454 | 9377 | 14014 | 17331 | 17368 | 20766 | 24503 | 27695 |
| Other manufacturing | 2053 | 5387 | 10114 | 12593 | 12543 | 13674 | 15573 | 16877 |
| Electricity, gas and water supply | 3157 | 10637 | 15587 | 19057 | 21554 | 24556 | 26966 | 29409 |
| Construction | 2640 | 9043 | 14333 | 18574 | 18122 | 21172 | 23682 | 26434 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods | 1585 | 555.2 | 114.76 | 149.27 | 15959 | 18406 | 19613 | 22139 |
| Hotels and restaurants | 1640 | 5033 | 9339 | 1536 | 12470 | 13466 | 14693 | 16706 |
| Transport and communications | 3220 | 1135.1 | 1645.2 | 20761 | 22401 | 25590 | 28609 | 31608 |
| Of which communication | 2879 | 11389 | 16043 | 19918 | 20923 | 24275 | 26995 | 28514 |
| Financial intermediation | 5232 | 22464 | 34880 | 41872 | 42373 | 50120 | 55789 | 59070 |
| Real estate, renting and business activities | 2457 | 10237 | 16642 | 21275 | 22510 | 25623 | 28289 | 31448 |
| Public administration and defence, compulsory social security | 2712 | 10959 | 16896 | 21344 | 23960 | 25121 | 27566 | 35780 |
| Education | 1240 | 5430 | 8778 | 11317 | 13294 | 14075 | 15809 | 19032 |
| Health and social work | 1333 | 5906 | 10037 | 13049 | 14820 | 15724 | 17545 | 20777 |
| Other community, social and personal service activities | 1548 | 5291 | 10392 | 13539 | 15070 | 16371 | 18200 | 20836 |

closed down.

To fully establish which parts of the class belong to the labour aristocracy it is not sufficient to look only at wages but also to look at the relationship of the organisation of the class, their history of struggles, etc. However, from the monthly wages we can already assume that workers in the oil and gas sector can be seen as part of the labour aristocracy. In 2012, the monthly income of workers in the “mining of energy producing minerals” (R57,267) and in “manufacturing of coke and refined petroleum products” (R56,576) was more than twice the average monthly income of R26,822 for all employees. Similar wages were only paid in “financial intermediation” (R59070), a sector that is socially quite separate from the rest of the working class.

The worst paid are legal or illegal immigrant workers, mainly from the central Asian, ex-soviet republics. In the Soviet Union, internal migration was largely controlled and planned, but brought already an additional 9 million inhabitants to Russia. From 1990 onwards, millions more journeyed to Russia either to escape wars and serious conflicts inside the former USSR republics or to find work.³³ This migration fluctuates according to the season and economic development, and figures for “illegal”³⁴ immigration are rather problematic. However, a figure of around 10 to 12 million for immigrant workers would account for 15 per cent of the working population and an even higher proportion of the working class. As usual, migrant workers are concentrated in construction, seasonal agriculture, logistics and retail. They are the object of anti-Islamic, anti-Asian and anti-Caucasian chauvinism.

Women workers have suffered even more from the restructuring of the economy than men. They have generally been pushed out from the better paid jobs, and the gender pay gap widened as the general differentiation of wages hit the lower tiers, where already from soviet times women were more numerous,³⁵ hardest. The closure of childcare facilities in the workplaces excluded even more women from full-time and permanent jobs. Discrimination on the job market is marked and frankly overt. Women will play an important role in any movement against attacks on public services

and in the unionisation of retail and lower paid industries.

Organisations of the working class

As early as 1991, in response to the growing number of strikes, especially in the mining industry, the Russian government initiated “Social Partnership”. It was promoted as a principle for settling labour conflicts at the federal level. In particular, in the Presidential Decree “On social partnership and labour disputes” the chief activities of social partnership included:

- Signing of annual general agreements between the Government of the Russian Federation, authorised representatives of the republican associations of trade unions and employers,
- Signing of tripartite sectoral agreements, and sharing responsibility for socio-economic development of a particular industry, and Establishment of the Republic’s Commission on the signing of general agreements between employers, unions and government.

“Social partnership” is, on the one hand, a hollow phrase to integrate the trade union bureaucracy into the state and to align them with the goals of imperialism and the needs of capital. It can have a material base where a labour aristocracy can in fact be bribed to serve the imperialist goals of its ruling class. However, in the early 1990s, there was not much labour aristocracy around and the imperialist project had yet to be defined.

Participation in the privatisation process allowed the trade union bureaucrats to continue as “co-managers”.³⁶ In general, they continued their collaboration with the new capitalist owners as they had done with the party leaders and directors, all being members of the *nomenklatura*. The FNPR³⁷ as official successor of the VZSPS³⁸ still accounts for 23 million members of the 37 million trade unionists in 1990.

Other significant union organisations include the KTR³⁹, a fusion of the VTK⁴⁰ and the KTR in 2006, represents 2.4 million workers, and is in general the more militant federation⁴¹, while the MPRA⁴² is a militant trade union in the transnational car industry (Ford, VW, Benteler) founded in 2006. It has established itself through militant strikes. Their



ROT Front supporters protest against Putin's fraudulent election in Moscow, December 2011

leaders have again and again been subjected to repression by state organs, local administration, company security and unidentified thugs. Some of its leaders are associated with socialist and communist ideas.

The Communist Party (KPRF) is not a bourgeois workers' party in the classical sense. It represents that part of the Stalinist bureaucracy that was unable to become bourgeois. As such, it reflects the anger of those not profiting from privatisation and capitalist development. Under the Putin regime, it accepts the basic elements of policy regarding its imperialist strategy, nationalism and chauvinism. It is not impossible that it could be transformed into a bourgeois workers' party under changed conditions where it is obliged to move into open opposition and attracts significant numbers of workers into its ranks without fundamentally changing its politics.

There are several groups that originated in splits from the KPRF, such as the All Russian Communist Party of the Future, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the All-union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), the Russian Communist Workers' Party of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (RCWP-CPSU) or the Communists of Russia. In general they all look back to Stalinism as an answer to the nationalism and opportunism of the KPRF.

The Left Front was an attempt to unify left groups and its origins lie in the Russian Social Forum. It was later joined by the Vanguard of the Red Youth, whose leader, Sergei Udaltsov, became the central person of Left Front. In practice it has an unclear attitude towards the liberals. It is one thing to organise common protests over democratic issues, quite another to accept bans on social issues or engage in joint political platforms, or even coalitions, with Kasparov's "Other Russia". The Left Front formed an official party ROT Front⁴³ together with other organisations. This did not prevent Udaltsov from serving as campaign manager for Zhuganov

in the presidential elections of 2012.

Russian capitalism today

The political weakness of the bourgeoisie has its counterpart, as well as its origin in the mode of accumulation. It is difficult to find figures to determine a quota, but a large part of capitalist "return" is derived from rent and not from the production of surplus value.⁴⁴ This obviously is the case in oil and gas production, where the low costs of production and high prices on the world market allow for a large part of the profit to be redistributed as rent.

There is also what Dzasosov calls "Insider rent". "Insiders" in this context are managers or shareholders in a position to control the money circulation for their own advantage or that of allies. In this way a part of the profit (or potential profit as this might also take place in loss-making companies) is diverted. These insiders are not, or not so much, interested in the general development of the company as their benefits are more or less independent of that.

This way of generating "profit" is very prevalent in Russia for two reasons. The general one is that this way of "generating profit" is expanding in the decay period of imperialism. With the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, capital owners seek other ways to "make money" outside of value production. One method, quite similar to "insider rent" is the way hedge funds take over middle-sized companies. The assets are immediately sold or externalised into a separate company from which the production company has to rent. The liquid money is transferred to the hedge fund and the company has to borrow it again. This allows the allocation of "profits" independently of the profit rate the business generates in reality⁴⁵.

The second is the technique of channelling public money into certain private hands and it has proliferated in privatisation processes all over the world: the Public Private

Partnership (PPP) in Britain and the privatisation of the railways in Germany are prominent examples.

The dominant forms of creating “insider rent” in Russia are of course closely related to the methods the Stalinist bureaucracy used to extract its privileges.

These ways of creating bourgeois revenue are not only economically favoured by a capitalist system in crisis, but also reproduced by the Russian bourgeoisie itself, whose dominating force is still the state bureaucracy. This reproduction takes place very practically. Companies focusing on production are forced to seek state protection and to deliver rent. So they integrate into the system. On the other hand, they do so unwillingly. The wave of protests in 2012 was partly fuelled by the dissatisfaction of the liberal, entrepreneurial layer of the Russian bourgeoisie. It does not want to deliver “insider-rent”; rather it seeks its own share of the rent from oil and gas extraction.

On the other hand, the Putin administration has to support the development of value producing capitalists. It has done so with some success with billions of subsidies in the agrarian and food sector, in which about 50 giant holdings have been established.⁴⁶ Manufacturing industry has to follow and attempts are being made in the car industry. If successful, this could give the Russian bourgeoisie more weight and self-esteem, but investment in these sectors will also strengthen the influence of foreign capital.

The two wings of the Russian bourgeoisie in general cannot do without each other. The Bonapartist state machine has to develop the economy and thus has to strengthen the private sector. The liberals, whose base is in the private sector, of course blame Putin but have to thank him for saving Russian capitalism and its role in the world. This conflict is not as deep as the comparable one in China, but it opens up chances for the working class to take up the struggle for democratic rights in its own way just the same. Such a struggle would provide an excellent opportunity for the working class to reorganise. The mass demonstrations in 2012 have shown that, when the left and workers’ organisations were able to break the ban of the liberals on social demands and organised separate demonstration columns.

The general dependence of the liberal, entrepreneurial wing of the Russian bourgeoisie on the state for the maintenance of law and order reduces its conflict with Putin and his apparatus to a struggle over its share of the mass of profits. While the liberal bourgeoisie does not want to be reduced to lower profit rates than the rent taken out of gas and oil, like its counterparts a century ago, it is a weak and cowardly class that will not itself generate a revolutionary movement to overthrow Putin’s autocratic regime. However, that is not to say that it, or its allies in the intelligentsia could not provide the figureheads for a foreign-inspired, and financed democratic “colour” revolution.

The solution to the democratic question, so widely alluded to by western imperialism and its media, will, therefore, ultimately lie in the hands of the Russian proletariat again. It will include the fight for democratic rights, for women’s and LGBT rights, the right of separation and self-determination for the national minorities and republics and the solution of a resurrected land question.

Russia and its neighbours

The collapse of the Soviet Union was referred to as “independence” not only in the newly formed republics, but also in the Russian Federation. The CIS, the Commonwealth of Independent States, was formed by 11 post-USSR republics. Georgia joined in 1993, but left in 2008. Turkmenistan reduced itself to associated membership in 2005. Ukraine had been wavering over its membership for many years and

finally terminated its membership after the departure of Crimea in 2014.

As a means to keep Russian domination, this project was a failure and had to be. Pre-occupied with establishing itself as a ruling class, the Russian bourgeoisie was not fit for the task of establishing imperialist domination of the neighbouring countries. Of course, the CIS did not work as a brotherly community either. There is no such thing in an imperialist world order. Immediately, the US and EU set their eyes on the surrounding states. In the wars and conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Russia and Georgia, and Crimea joining Russia against Ukraine’s will, the organisation did not play a role in either restricting Russia or the influence of US or EU imperialism. The latter also engaged six of the CIS states in the “East European Partnership” in 2009 despite Russia’s protests.⁴⁷

Some of the CIS states, however, do stand under the clear domination of Russia today. Belarus does not develop much foreign policy of its own and is economically closely connected to Russia. Kazakhstan gets 36 per cent of its imports from Russia (with China coming in second with 18 per cent⁴⁸ and other imperialists way behind). Both countries are members of the same international treaty organisations as Russia, such as the Euroasian Free Trade Zone and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Although the integration of Ukraine into this bloc was always a goal for Russia, extensive economic ties to Russia, exports and imports, were more and more replaced by links to the EU. Compared to Belarus and Kazakhstan, Ukraine is a relatively highly developed industrial country exporting not only raw materials and energy, like Kazakhstan and Russia itself, but also high technology products such as armaments, aircraft, ships and power plants.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are, to a great extent, labour reserves for Russia. In 2011, of the more than 9 million immigrant workers in Russia there were approximately 2 million Uzbeks, 1 million Tajiks and 500,000 Kyrgyz.⁴⁹ Some of these countries are highly dependent on this emigrant workforce. In 2009, the money transfer from Russia to Tajikistan made up some 30 per cent of its GDP, to Moldova about 20 per cent.⁵⁰

The economic weakness of Russia makes its control over the other former Soviet republics vulnerable as the offers of the EU show. In all European statistics on GDP per capita, or average income, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova come near the bottom. The difficulties facing Russia in developing a ruling class and of this class in developing a national economy in the context of the global crisis of capitalism are multiplied in the satellite states. The offer of a Eurasian Free Trade Zone is not the most enticing. The US, and even more the EU, can offer higher wages for migrant workers, posts in the EU bureaucracy for the intelligentsia and jobs as sales representatives for imported products.

The economic ties of Russia to its neighbours, then, are mainly the export of energy and the import of migrant workers. On the other hand, Russia was in a position to intervene into the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, to send troops to Abkhazia and South Ossetia against Georgia, to Transnistria against Moldova and to Crimea against the will of Ukraine. The fact that in these cases the local populations supported these interventions certainly made them easier for Russia but nevertheless they prove which is the imperialist power and which are the semi-colonies.

Where this support is not forthcoming, such as in Chechnya, none of the Caucasus states were able to intervene, even had any wished to do so. In fact, Chechnya can be considered a colony, because this republic declared its autonomy and even had a recognised government before it



The symbols of resistance: flag of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Ribbon of St George

was occupied by Russian troops again. This also proves the imperialist nature of the Russian state; it has the military power as well as the economic reserves to keep this powder keg under control, a control which has significantly improved under Putin's Bonapartism. This conflict can even be seen as a measure of Russia's imperialist potential and its development.

Russia and the EU

Under Putin, Russia has so far shown a clear preference to collaborate with the EU especially with its dominant force, German imperialism. This might also be supported by a widespread anti-Americanism in Russia, as a result of the Cold War⁵¹ and the experience of the 1990s, when the US quickly spoiled the credit it had gained initially in public opinion. In any event, the preference has a material base in the fact that this is an important economic combination; Russia sends gas and oil; EU/Germany delivers technology.

In 2013, 13.3 per cent of Russia's exports went to the Netherlands, 7.5 per cent to Italy, 7 per cent to Germany but only 2.1 per cent to the US. Poland (3.7 per cent), UK (3.4 per cent) and Finland (2.4 per cent) were all ahead of the US, with Latvia (2 per cent) not much behind.⁵² In 2012, 52.9 per cent of the exports went to the EU, 6.8 per cent to China, 3 per cent to Japan and just 2.5 per cent to the USA. From the EU, came 41.9 per cent of all imports, with 16.3 per cent from China and 4.9 per cent each from the US and Japan. The Total Trade Value between the EU and Russia has tripled between 2003 (€108 billion) and 2013 (€326 billion).⁵³

Russia has tried to deepen these ties to the EU, for example, trying to achieve an easier visa regulation. This is frequently demanded by Western business partners as well as by the Russian population. From the side of the EU the talks were postponed again and again. Although this shows that the EU is in a somewhat stronger position, at the same time, Russia is not ready to give EU citizens easier access to Russia than the EU gives to Russians, as weak states like Ukraine or Serbia are forced to do.

Russia and US Imperialism

The agreement Gorbachev made, that Nato would not seek to extend its reach "one inch to the East", was surely never taken seriously by US imperialism itself. The accompanying offer, for Russia to join NATO, probably also not meant very seriously; if it meant anything, it meant that Russia could become a semi-colony, or maybe a regional power, under the control of the US.

The US started to put their feet on the ground immediately after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Their focus was on Central Asia, and they were engaged already in Iraq. To gain control over Georgia and Azerbaijan would mean having a direct connection from the Black Sea to the Caspian, thereby blocking Russia's ambition to the south. This "Silk Road" strategy was even adopted as a Bill by the House of Representatives in 1999. The intervention in Georgia with the "Rose Revolution" of 2003 underlined these ambitions. The US effectively could use the tensions between Georgia and Russia (Abkhazia, Ossetia) and between Azerbaijan and Russia as well as supporting Armenia in the conflict over Nagorno Karabach.

A strong attack on Russia's position was, and is the US policy in Ukraine. Already in 2004, with the staging of the Orange "Revolution", this attack was on the cards. However, with the elections in 2008 replacing Timoshenko with Yanukovich, Russia regained ground. The Maidan movement and the consequent activities – sending military experts, mercenaries and the attempts to take over the country's most valuable assets – were well prepared.⁵⁴

For the US, the intervention in Ukraine as well as the Georgian provocation of attacking South Ossetia in 2008 also served to disrupt relations between Russia and EU/Germany. They were combined with political pressure on European countries to confront Russia and with the call for economic sanctions. These, of course, have almost no practical consequences for the US economy at all, but could be a heavy blow to the EU.

On the other hand, Russia has effectively opposed US ambitions in Syria. Here, both states had influence: Russia

was granted a seaport and Bashar Assad had given way to US demands for economic access and privatisation. When the Syrian people's revolution started in 2010, the US strategy was to finance and equip counter-revolutionary Islamic forces to take over the leadership of the struggle, thereby undermining its progressive potential, and to pressurising Assad or even forcing him out of power. Of course, this also had the aim of weakening the position of Russia. Russia's equally counter-revolutionary strategy was to support the Assad regime with arms, which has saved the regime so far and checked US ambitions.

Russia's place in the world today

In the global imperialist system today there are no stable camps as there were during the Second World War or the Cold War. Confrontation in one part of the world can go along with cooperation in another, very similar to the competition that exists between capitalist monopolies, which might also cooperate in one project or market and fiercely attack each other in another one. The simple logic lies in the fact that cooperation might bring immediate profits that can be used for other projects or conflicts. Also co-operation does not mean necessarily that both partners share the profit equally or even that there is profit at all.⁵⁵

Despite its substantial economic weakness, which was partly balanced by the crisis that hit the old imperialist powers more than the new ones, Russia successfully conquered and defended a place among the leading imperialist powers. Its strong cards are its long time influence in the neighbouring countries, its natural resources and its military power.

The changes in the global imperialist system of the last 25 years were only possible through the final defeat of the degenerated workers' states, a historic defeat for the working class, and the global crisis of capitalism that had been building up for decades, but was, in historical terms, temporarily postponed by the defeat of the workers' states. Both factors allowed Russia to become an imperialist power and occupy a place, though a weak one, among the global imperialist players.

Of course, the US, which accepted, or had to accept and even support the rise of China as an imperialist rival, did not see anything positive in Russia gaining power. Therefore, Washington is more opposed to Russia than to the EU and China, which are forced to play the game of cooperation/confrontation among the imperialist powers in order to maintain their status.

REFERENCES

- 1 This danger is expressed in a fear of China taking Siberia or Russia's far East, or the US invading Southern Russia. Both scenarios are displayed in movies, articles or in nationalist propaganda.
- 3 This is the goal of the Euro-Asiatic Free-trade Zone
- 4 (Revolution Betrayed) "Würde dagegen die herrschende Sowjetkaste von einer bürgerlichen Partei gestürzt, so fände letztere unter den heutigen Bürokraten, Administratoren, Technikern, Direktoren, Parteisekretären, überhaupt privilegierten Spitzen, nicht wenig willige Diener."
- 5 The fact that some of the most ugly oligarchs as Anatoli Chubais or Khodorkovsky were members of a group of high ranking members of the Komsomol who were trained as capitalists does not contradict this. It just shows that they were obviously able to play according to new rules better than the old bureaucrats. Gorbachov's young guards were not a social force, just its tool.
- 6 To point at the intelligentsia is done by Dzarasov in

Russian Dzarasov (2011): *Werewolves of Stalinism: Russia's Capitalists and their System*, *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe*, 19:1-2, 473. Dzarasov himself cites Lane and Menshikov: "Lane speaks of two main social groupings which aided in the downfall of the Soviet system and its transition to capitalism. These were the "administrative class", consisting of people who exercised bureaucratic control over production, education and science, and the "appropriating class", made up of the intelligentsia who had an interest in using market mechanisms as a way to benefit from their professional knowledge. To these two social categories can be added the black-market entrepreneurs who had gradually developed within the pores of the Soviet system (Men'shikov).

- 7 We should look closer at this phenomenon: for example in Germany this layer produced rather many politicians.
- 8 Dzarasov, 474
- 9 That the oligarch Khodorkovsky, probably the most effective accumulator of stolen public property is now presented as a hero of democratic liberation struggle only shows the flexibility of western bourgeois moral political standards.
- 10 Dakar is Russian for December
- 11 Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Volume One: The Overthrow of Tsarism, Chapter 1, Peculiarities of Russian Development.
- 12 Die englische und französische Bourgeoisie hatten die neue Gesellschaft nach ihrem Ebenbilde errichtet. Die deutsche ist später gekommen und sie musste lange bei dem Haferabsud der Philosophie sitzen. Die Deutschen haben das Wort Weltanschauung ausgedacht, das weder die Engländer noch die Franzosen besitzen: während die westlichen eine neue Welt schufen, beschauten die Deutschen sie. Aber die in Bezug auf politische Tätigkeit so dürrtliche deutsche Bourgeoisie schuf die klassische Philosophie und dies ist keine geringe Einlage. Die russische Bourgeoisie kam noch später. Zwar hat sie das deutsche Wort Weltanschauung ins Russische übersetzt, sogar in mehreren Varianten, aber damit zeigte sie nur krasser zugleich mit ihrer politischen Impotenz ihre tätliche philosophische Dürrtigkeit. Sie importierte Ideen wie auch Technik, richtete für die letzteren hohe Zölle ein und für die ersteren eine Quarantäne der Angst. (Trotsky, *Geschichte der Russischen Revolution*, Band 1 Februar, Seite 165 Fischer 1973)
- 13 This is a difference from the Chinese Bureaucracy: There has always remained a Chinese bourgeoisie in Taiwan and Hong Kong, as whose agent the Chinese Bureaucracy can be seen.
- 14 (Menshikov 61 2) quoted from Dzarasov
- 15 Dzarasov, 475: The most important task, according to this view, was establishing as quickly as possible and at any cost a class of private property owners, who would rule out any possibility of a so-called "communist revenge"
- 16 In the article on Russia 2000 M.Pröbsting calls this a process of primary accumulation. I think this term is misleading as the primary accumulation in the youth of capitalism served to collect funds to invest into the production of surplus value. This is exactly the feature of Russian capitalism that is grossly underdeveloped. The more appropriate term would be "final extraction", before the situation or even the system would change again.
- 17 "To hand over control and ownership of productive assets is one thing; to make the owners act as agents

of capital and force the workers to submit to being a surplus value producing, exploited class is quite another." Keith Harvey 1997

18 Воейков М.И., Анисимова Г.В., Соболев Э.Н. Трудовые отношения капитализма и российские трудовые ценности. М.: ИЭ РАН, 2009. С. 9-11. Zitiert nach Aitowa, Gulnara.

19 Grafik 1: Arbeitslosenquote (ILO) und bei Arbeitsämtern registrierte Arbeitslose 1992 2011 Quelle: Russischer Föderaler Dienst für Statistik (Rosstat)

20 TROTZ DES STARKEN TRANSFORMATIONSSCHOCKS NACH DEM ENDE DER SOWJETUNION, IN DESSEN VERLAUF DAS BRUTTOINLANDSPRODUKT IN DEN 1990ER JAHREN UM BIS ZU 40 per cent EINBRACH, HATTE RUSSLAND IM VERGLEICH ZU ANDEREN TRANSFORMATIONSLÄNDERN STETS EINE RELATIV NIEDRIGE ARBEITSLOSENQUOTE. IHREN HÖCHSTWERT ERREICHTE DIE ARBEITSLOSIGKEIT IM KRISENJAHR 1998 MIT 13 per cent, WÄHREND SIE IN DER TRANSFORMATIONSPHASE IN VIELEN ANDEREN LÄNDERN, DARUNTER POLEN, SLOWAKEI UND BULGARIEN BEI FAST 20 per cent LAG.

DER GRUND, WARUM DIE ARBEITSLOSIGKEIT IN RUSSLAND TROTZ DER EXTREMEN WIRTSCHAFTSKRISE RELATIV NIEDRIG AUSFIEL, LIEGT IM RUSSISCHEN ARBEITSMARKTMODELL. DER RUSSISCHE ARBEITSMARKT REAGIERTE AUF DIE WIRTSCHAFTSTRANSFORMATION NICHT MIT EINEM ANSTIEG DER ARBEITSLOSIGKEIT, SONDERN MIT STARKEN EINBUßEN FÜR DIE BESCHÄFTIGTEN DURCH GEWALTIGE ARBEITSZEITVERKÜRZUNGEN, STARKE EINSCHNITTE BEI DEN REALLÖHNEN, RIESIGE RÜCKSTÄNDE BEI DEN LOHNZAHLUNGEN, VERBREITETEN ZWANGSURLAUB UND EINE UNZUREICHENDE DURCHSETZUNG DES ARBEITSRECHTS. HINZU KAM EINE UMFANGREICHE UMVERTEILUNG DER ARBEITSKRÄFTE
[HTTP://WWW.LAENDER-ANALYSEN.DE/RUSSLAND/PDF/RUSSLANDANALYSEN200.PDF](http://www.laender-analysen.de/ru/land/pdf/ru/land/analysen200.pdf)

21 See M. Pröbsting

22 On the contrary, the specific feature of the Russian transition has been the enormous contradiction between the form of property ownership and the content of the social relations of production and exchange that lay behind the legal form. This was due to the combined, and hence compromised, character of the transition process. The process has relied on an uneasy compromise between the forces of bourgeois counter-revolution representing interests outside the ruling Stalinist strata and those within it who are seeking to convert themselves into an important section of the new capitalist class. (Harvey)

23 In the process of capitalist restoration the state is the dynamo of transition. The state has to destroy the old apparatus of economic administration and create the legal and political framework within which capitalist social relations of production emerge. This framework has to define relations between the working class and the new exploiting class and impose the costs of restoration upon the workers. This is the first and most fundamental task of the state machine during the restoration of capitalism.

At the same time the new administration has to establish the ground rules for inter-capitalist competition. The state must act as a general executive of the capitalist class, raising itself above and over the competing capitalists. It has to enforce the general logic of capitalist accumulation against individual capitalists and against blocs of capital owned by the state itself. This second,

specifically capitalist function of the state apparatus generally takes longer to become fully operative (Harvey)

Harvey concludes in his article, that Russia is still a "moribund workers state" as neither task has been fully accomplished. The League has since then corrected the wrong definition of a "moribund workers state" as in a transition period (revolutionary or counterrevolutionary) the character of a state is not determined by the social relations as in "normal times", but by the political aim of the political power. This correction does not devalue the correct assessment of the article that the destruction of a planned economy even a bureaucratic one and replacing it by a functioning capitalist system is a huge task and the Russian bourgeoisie has for many years not been up to it.

24 Zahlen inflationsbereinigt nach Rosstat.

25 Average wages in US dollars

[HTTP://WWW.LAENDER-ANALYSEN.DE/RUSSLAND/PDF/RUSSLANDANALYSEN200.PDF](http://www.laender-analysen.de/ru/land/pdf/ru/land/analysen200.pdf)

Anm.: Für 2012 ist der Wert vom März des Jahres angegeben.

Quelle: Bank of Finland Institute for Economies in Transition, BOFIT Russia Statistics, http://www.suomenpankki.fi/bofit_en/seuran

26 As "Just Russia" or the KPRF

27 There exists in Russia a feature that can normally be found in semi-colonies, where a pro-imperialist party will compete with a more patriotic one.

28 RSPP - Russian Union of Industrialists and

Entrepreneurs (РОССИЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ ПРОМЫШЛЕННИКОВ И ПРЕДПРИНИМАТЕЛЕЙ)

29 RTK - Russian Tilateral Commission for the Regulation of Social and Labour Relations (РОССИЙСКАЯ ТРЕХСТОРОННЯЯ КОМИССИЯ ПО УРЕГУЛИРОВАНИЮ СОЦИАЛЬНО-ТРУДОВЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ)

30 Russia in figures, 2013 Copyright Федеральная служба государственной статистики Rosstat - Also the following tables.

31 Federal Law number 83 from 1.1.2011. It was greeted with demonstrations of the left against it.

32 Rosstat. One has to note though that the ratio has improved since 2000, where it was 985 : 2183 : 2223

33 Schon seit Mitte der 1970er Jahre richtete sich die Bevölkerungsmigration innerhalb der ehemaligen Sowjetunion hauptsächlich nach Russland aus. In dieser Zeit betrug der Migrationsbonus Russlands nach Angaben der Migrationsstatistik ca. 9 Millionen Menschen. Unter Berücksichtigung der Unzulänglichkeiten der Migrationsstatistik stimmen die meisten Experten darin überein, dass das Migrationsvolumen in den postsowjetischen Jahren um das 2-3 Fache grösser war als offiziell angegeben. Tatsächlich betrug der Bevölkerungszuwachs 14-16 Millionen.

INFOLGE DES MIGRATIONSRÜCKFLUSSES NACH RUSSLAND IN DER ERSTEN HÄLFTE DER 1990ER JAHRE VERLOR KASACHSTAN 12 per cent SEINER BEVÖLKERUNG, KIRGISTAN 10 per cent, TADSCHIKISTAN 9 per cent, USBEKISTAN UND TURKMENISTAN JEWEILS 5 per cent. UNTER DEN LÄNDERN DES SÜDLICHEN KAVKASUS HATTEN ARMENIEN MIT 10 per cent UND GEORGIEN MIT 8 per cent DIE GRÖßTEN VERLUSTE ZU VERZEICHNEN.

ASERBAIDDSCHAN VERLOR 7 per cent SEINER BEVÖLKERUNG. BELARUS WAR DAS EINZIGE LAND, DESSEN BEVÖLKERUNG INFOLGE DER MIGRATION AUS

RUSSLAND UM 0,2 per cent WUCHS.

RUSSLAND-ANALYSEN NR. 236, 23.03.2012 DIE ETHNISI-
 NISIERUNG DER MIGRATIONSPROZESSE IN RUSSLAND
 VON OLGA VENDINA, MOSKAU

- 34 "Illegal" means that in most cases that no work permis-
 sion is given. Entrance into the Russian Federation is
 still without restrictions for most of the former USSR
 republics.
- 35 USSR/Russia is seen as a prove against the theory that
 the gender pay gap has something to do with less qual-
 ification of women as the formal education has always
 been higher for women.
- 36 The legislation was adopted in June 1992 after a strug-
 gle between the Presidential executive, local administra-
 tion and the enterprise managers who had a strong
 voice in a Parliament still made up of unelected
 deputies from the Gorbachev era. The power of the min-
 istries was first diluted by making all state enterprises
 self-governing joint stock companies under the control
 of a board of directors, prior to being privatised. The
 board consisted of four members: the director, a trade
 union official and one representative each from national
 and local government. The ministries were thus side-
 lined (Harvey)
- 37 FNPR- Federation of Independent Trade Unions
 (ФЕДЕРАЦИЯ НЕЗАВИСИМЫХ
 ПРОФСОЮЗОВ РОССИИ)
- 38 VZSPS - All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions
 (Всесоюзный центральный совет
 профессиональных союзов - ВЦСПС)
- 39 KTR - Confederation of Labour of Russia
 (Конфедерация труда России)
- 40 VKT - All-Russian Confederation of Labour
 (Всероссийская конфедерация труда)
- 41 Compared to many other countries these figures seem
 to be quite reliable as they are the base for the union
 representation in the Tripartite Commission. Also the
 membership fees are still commonly deducted by the
 company.
- 42 MPRA
- 43 ROT stands for Russian United Labour (Front), but of
 course the name also refers to the "Red-Front", the mil-
 itary organisation of the KPD
- 44 The creation of surplus value is... the determining,
 dominating and overriding purpose of the capitalist; it is
 the absolute motive and content of his activity. K Marx,
 Capital Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1976, p990
- 45 Volume of Accumulated Foreign Investments in the
 Economy of Russia by Countries (Rosstat)
- 46 The total amount of subsidies in the year 2009 were
 \$3.7 billion, in 2010 \$5.5 billion. The goal of the govern-
 ment is to raise the quota of self-sufficiency from 60
 per cent to 85 per cent (Handelsblatt: Russlands
 Landwirtschaft: Die Erben der Kolchosen von Regine
 Palm und Florian Willershausen 13.06.2010)
- 47 Armenien, Aserbaidshan, Georgien, Moldawien, Ukraine
 und Weißrussland
- 48 <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/profile/country/kaz>
- 49 Der "Standard", 27.8.12
- 50 Die "Welt" 5.1.11
- 51 In contrast the Great Patriotic War was not against the
 Germans as it was in World War II in the US-American
 narrative, but against the fascists.
- 52 www.worldstopexports.com
- 53 European Commission, Directorate-General for Trade
- 54 According to their own sources, US institutions invested
 \$5 billion.
- 55 This is the case for instance when the talk is of "taking

over responsibilities", that is, sending in troops to
 repress any unwanted movement or conflict.

Fighting for working women and trade union rights

BOOK REVIEW

Eleanor Marx: A Life

Rachel Holmes, Bloomsbury, 2014
ISBN 9780747583844
£21.99

Rachel Holmes' new biography highlights Eleanor Marx's important contribution to the birth of mass trade unionism, women's liberation and socialist politics in the late 19th century. However, Holmes' labeling of her as a feminist blurs Eleanor's socialist and class, argues Joy Macready

ELEANOR MARX WAS a revolutionary writer, orator, organiser, fighter, socialist and internationalist to her core – a person of words and action. Her life story is worth telling, and Rachel Holmes does an admirable job in creating a three-dimensional picture of Eleanor's life.

Brought up in a household where German, English and French were spoken on a daily basis, she earned renown as a gifted translator, tackling literary masterpieces such as Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* as well as key political texts, including the *History of the Paris Commune* by Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray; *Anarchism and Socialism* by Georgi Plekhanov; and in 1885 she participated in the translation into English of volume one of her father's *Capital*.

She also played an invaluable role as an interpreter at congresses of the Second International, as well as an International Miners' Congress. For her efforts, the Miners' Federation and the Miners' Union presented her with "a beautiful little writing case and a stylographic pen"¹ because she refused to take any payment.

Eleanor edited much of her father's, Karl Marx, works, including *Value, Price and Profit*, written in 1865. She was a prolific journalist and writer, a theoretician as well as practical organiser. She also volunteered to help working class militants by providing free literary and numeracy classes, as well as language classes.

After her father's death in 1883, Eleanor wrote: "My father was talking of my eldest sister and of me and said: 'Jenny is most like me, but Eleanor (my dear old home name) is me.' It was true – except that I shall never be good and unselfish as he was."²

Her tireless efforts to build socialism in Britain and internationally proved this last estimate to be utterly false. She had the brilliance, the spark and the will to devote herself to socialist politics her whole life. Respected and admired by most, she

did not shy away from a political argument.

She played an instrumental role in the development of New Unionism and produced important theoretical work on the woman question.

Early life

Born on 16 January 1855 in Soho, London, Eleanor was the youngest of three sisters that survived into adulthood, together with Jenny and Laura. The Marxes had two sons and one daughter that died in infancy. On Engels' deathbed, she also found out that she had a half brother, Freddy, who was the son of the Marxes' housekeeper Helene Demuth, their beloved Nymmy.

Eleanor (pronounced to rhyme with pussy not fussy) was born in Victorian Britain, where women had no right to an education – they were barred from university and most professions. They could neither stand for office nor vote in national elections, and had no control over their reproductive rights. On most matters concerning property too they were effectively the wards of their husbands or fathers. It was a fully patriarchal society though a minority of talented and courageous women were already fighting to right these crying injustices. Eleanor became one of them.

Early in her life she boldly asked: "What is it that we as socialists desire?", and spent her whole life searching for answers to this question. Eleanor had the brilliance of her father and was steeped in his political methodology – she and Volume I of *Capital* spent the first decade of her life together. With a house full of books surrounding her, though she had little formal education she was a vociferous reader and her father was ever ready to answer her questions.

Eleanor started intervening in politics at an early age. At the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, when she was six years old, she wrote letters of advice to Abraham Lincoln (which Marx didn't post). At eight, she supported Poland when



Eleanor Marx

the country was invaded by Russia in 1983 – in a letter to her uncle, she wrote that she was holding up a finger for the Poles, “brave little fellows”.

Her friends included Olive Schreiner, a South African novelist and anti-war activist; May Morris, the daughter of William Morris; Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, the first Englishwoman to qualify as a surgeon; and German socialist Clara Zetkin. Her male friends included Irish dramatist George Bernard Shaw; Will Thorne, the first general secretary of the Trade Union Congress; Wilhelm Liebknecht, co-founder of German Social Democracy (and Karl’s father); plus Karl Kautsky and Eduard Bernstein.

After her father’s death, Engels effectively replaced him in the role of guardian and advisor. Engels’ companions, the sisters Mary and Lizzie Burns, who were involved in the Irish Republican movement, also influenced Eleanor’s political development. The 12-year old Eleanor enthusias-

tically supported the 1867 Fenian Rising in county Kerry and then Dublin, and campaigned for the release of the political prisoners. She condemned the hanging of the Manchester Martyrs – Philip Allen, Michael Larkin, and Michael O’Brien – who were executed for the killing of a police officer.

When Eleanor was 16, the Paris Commune exploded in March 1871, lasting until May. Both Eleanor’s older sisters had married French revolutionaries: Laura married Paul Lafargue, influenced by anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Louis Auguste Blanqui; and Jenny married Charles Longuet, also a militant Proudhonist.

In fact, Laura was in Bordeaux with two gravely ill sons, Marc Laurent and Charles, while her husband had gone missing on the journey to Paris. In April Jenny and Eleanor went to Laura’s aid. By the time they got there, Paul had turned up but police spies were closing in, so they fled to the Spanish border in the Pyrenees at the beginning of August,

after Marc Laurent’s death.

When Jenny and Eleanor returned to France on foot, they were immediately seized by the police, interrogated for two days and then held under house arrest for a week before being dumped at the Spanish border. The bourgeois newspapers at that time reported that three of Marx’s “brothers” had been interned in France.

The astonishing secret was that Jenny had been able to conceal an incriminating letter to Marx from Gustave Flourens, a famed leader of the Paris Commune, murdered by the Versailles troops after his capture on 3 April, 1871. When they were brought into the gendarmerie, she had hid it in a ledger on the booking officer’s desk – so while the Lafargues’ flat was being searched, it was in plain view.

After the fall of the Paris Commune, Commune refugees flooded into London, many passing through the Marxes’ house, No 11 Modena Villas, Hampstead. From them Eleanor learned about the legendary women street fighters of the Paris Commune and the year before had met Elisabeth Demetriooff, a Russian revolutionary, who during the uprising organised the Union de femmes and women’s committees in every Paris *arrondissement* (borough). She also fought on the barricades in the last week of the Commune and survived.

Eleanor too had Commune admirers, including Leo Frankel, a Hungarian; Nikolai Morozov, Russian member of the People’s Will (*Narodnaya Volya*) which assassinated Alexander II in 1881; and Karl Hirsch, German socialist and editor. But she also developed a marked preference for Prosper-Olivier Lissagaray, 17 years her senior, the first historian of the Commune. A long engagement ensued until it was broken off in 1881.

On Sundays, the Marxes would open up their house to the exiled revolutionary community in London, what they called “at homes”, and most revolutionaries at one time or another crossed their threshold to engage in political discussion, often quite heated debate, about the way forward for the socialist movement in Europe and beyond. Her friend, Clara Collet’s memory of the Marxes’ house was of a “room full of people all talking French at the top of their voices”³.

Throughout her twenties, Eleanor was actively involved in London education policy, the debate over Irish home rule, the evolution of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the amnesty campaign for Communards, which was finally granted in 1880.

She was also a talented amateur actor, forming the “Dogberry Club” with Clara.

From the age of 16, Eleanor became her father’s secretary and accompanied him to socialist conferences around Europe, as well as helping him with research at the British Museum. Much later, in 1882, it was in the Reading Room where she met Edward Aveling, a freethinker and vice president of the National Secular Society who also occasionally acted on the stage. Two years later, and a year after her father’s death, she and Edward began living together, but they couldn’t marry because he had a wife already.

Prior to this, when Eleanor was 26, her mother,

Jenny (Eleanor's older sister) died in December 1881. Just over a year later and five days before Eleanor's 28th birthday, Jenny died in January 1883 and then her father, just two months after her sister.

New Unionism

The New Union movement began developing in the 1870s, but really made its mark in the 1880s. Previously, the British labour movement was organised in craft unions, a "labour aristocracy" who were mainly skilled workers that ignored and excluded the unskilled workers.

Yet there were thousands of workers employed as unskilled or semi-skilled labourers, including dockers, seamen, gas workers, factory workers and general labourers. These were the most oppressed layer of the British proletariat, both men and women, poorly paid and with terrible working conditions. Nevertheless in the 1880s they began to organise and take militant strike action, and won some important reforms.

In 1884, Eleanor became involved in the Women's Trade Union League, founded 10 years previously by Emma Patterson. Eleanor went on to become actively involved in a whole series of strikes,

In the late 1880s there were four major strikes that enflamed the British working class. The first, which is only now being recognised for its role in taking new unionism to the next level, was the matchwomen's strike at the Bryant & May match factory in Bow, London. On 2 July 1888 these unskilled, unorganised, poverty-stricken women, went on strike, as captured in Louise Raw's book, *Striking a Light*⁴.

They were subject to pittance wages and terrible working conditions, and many suffered from "phossy jaw", a form of bone cancer, as a result of lethal phosphorus fumes and poor ventilation. When a group of women refused to sign the employer's statement saying that their working conditions were fair, three were sacked – and then the vast majority of workers walked out.

They didn't leave the factory grounds, but waited at the gates for workers from the other sites to come out, told them what had happened and persuaded them not to go back after the lunch break. More than 1,500 matchworkers went on all-out indefinite strike. They had a lively and well-attended picket line and they elected a strike committee. Fourteen days into the strike, management caved in.

These workers formed a union, the Union of Women Matchmakers, and held the first meeting on 27 July. By the end of the year, it became the Matchmakers Union, open to men and women, and the following year sent its first delegate to the TUC.

It is easy to see how those women provided inspiration for a new type of trade unionism. They were young, militant and unwavering in their solidarity and support for each other. And they forced the bosses to climb down.

The next workers' action started in early spring at the Beckton Gas Works in the East End of London. The lives of the workers at Beckton, as with other gas works, were very poor: a 12 hour day, seven days a week, with the associated dangers of the job. This led to industrial unrest and in March 1889, workers from the Beckton Gas Works were laid off. Gasworkers from all over London held a protest meeting on Sunday 31 March.

Will Thorne, who went on to become the first general secretary of the National Union of Gas Workers, made a speech on that day: "The way you have been treated in your work for many years is scandalous, brutal and inhuman. I pledge my word that, if you will stand firm and don't waver, within six months we will claim and win the eight-hour day, a six-day week and the abolition of the present slave-driving

methods in vogue not only at the Beckton Gas Works, but all over the country."⁵ After this speech, 800 workers joined the new union on the first day, and within a month another 3000 had joined.

The gasworkers won an eight-hour day. On the back of this action, they formed National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers (NUG&GL) on 7 June. Thorne, elected leader of the union, asked Eleanor for help. She helped to draft the union rules and compose its constitution. She kept the accounts and wrote the half-year report – Thorne described her as the "most intelligent woman he had ever known".⁶ She was a political agitator, travelling up and down country, sometimes speaking twice a day.

Later that year saw the Great Dock Strike, an industrial dispute involving dockworkers in the port of London. It resulted in a victory for more than 100,000 strikers and established strong trade unions amongst London dockers, one of which became the nationally important Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union. The strike is widely considered a milestone in the development of new unionism.

Eleanor had already published articles on how the dockers had to physically fight each other every morning to get work for the day – which made it even more significant that the dockers collectivised and organised to implement a mass strike.

The Great Dock Strike started on 14 August 1889 when dockers unloading cargo on South-West India docks walked off the job when a supervisor refused to pay the extra owed to them. On 21 August 100,000 supporters demonstrated in Hyde Park, with seven bands playing the 'Marseillaise', demonstrating their revolutionary feelings.

The next day saw 37,000 workers on strike, brought out by 15,000 flying pickets; by 25 August there were more than 130,000 strikers, including stevedores, ship-painters, carpenters and biscuit and jam factory workers. The dockers organised almost daily marches through the streets, collecting money to sustain their fight. It was internationally celebrated; Australian dockers sent a £30,000 donation.

The dockers returned to work on 16 September having won all their demands. Other workers took up the call to build unions and win better conditions.

Another strike that Eleanor had direct involvement in was the Silvertown strike among workers at Silver's rubber and electrical factory, again in the East End of London docklands. (See the review of John Tully's book *Silvertown* below).

The Silvertown strike ended in defeat on 10 December and the employers vindictively sent the bailiffs in to evict workers from factory-owned lodgings – so not only did they lose their jobs but also their homes.

Eleanor placed the blame for the defeat squarely on the leaders of the skilled labour unions who didn't call their members out in support of their unskilled brothers and sisters.

Despite this setback, there were major strikes in Cardiff, Bristol, Wolverhampton, Sheffield, Manchester, Halifax, Hull and Tyneside. In Leeds thousands of gasworkers joined the union and won an eight-hour day. The so-called unorganised workers were organising all over the country.

Eleanor was a hugely popular speaker, and toured around all the hot spots of unionisation, including the Hammersmith shop assistants strike, onion skinners, women workers at Barratt's sweet factory in Tottenham and the railway workers.

The year 1890 saw the first May Day demonstration, which emerged from the First Congress of the Second International, and more than 300,000 workers filled Hyde Park. Eleanor addressed the gathered workers with this speech:

"We have not come to do the work of political parties, but



we have come here in the cause of labour, in its own defence, to demand its own rights. I can remember when we came in handfuls of a few dozen to Hyde Park to demand an Eight Hours' Bill, but the dozens have grown to hundreds, and the hundreds to thousands, until we have this magnificent demonstration that fills the park today. We are standing face to face with another demonstration, but I am glad to see that the great masses of the people are on our side.

"Those of us who have gone through all the worry of the Dock Strike, and especially the Gasworkers' Strike, and have seen the men, women and children stand round us, have had enough of strikes, and we are determined to secure an eight hours' day by legal enactment; unless we do so, it will be taken from us at the first opportunity..."

"I am speaking this afternoon not only as a Trade Unionist, but as a Socialist. Socialists believe that the eight hours' day is the first and most immediate step to be taken, and we aim at a time when there will no longer be one class supporting two others, but the unemployed both at the top and at the bottom of society will be got rid of. This is not the end but only the beginning of the struggle; it is not enough to come here to demonstrate in favour of an eight hours' day. We must not be like some Christians who sin for six days and go to church on the seventh, but we must speak for the cause daily, and make the men, and especially the women that we meet, come into the ranks to help us."

She ended her speech the conclusion of the famous poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley:

"Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number,
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many – they are few."⁷

From the start of 1889 to the end of 1893, Eleanor was immersed in socialist strategy and mobilisation at home and abroad. She convened, caucused and networked. She wrote policy and

think pieces, and drafted reports. Keir Hardie, Tillet and Thorne were regular visitors to Eleanor's home long before they became famous as labour leaders.

She was highly respected in the British labour movement and was given two nicknames – "our mother" and "our old stoker" – by the workers that she struggled alongside. In 1895 she published "The Working Class Movement in England".⁸

Political representation

The 1860s were a time of political recovery for the British labour movement after the decade or so which followed the defeat and collapse of Chartism. The British unions played an important role in the International Workingmen's Association (the First International). But this proved to be a false dawn. Not only because the 1871 Paris Commune suffered defeat, and the ensuing repressive legislation, but also because a worldwide economic depression began in 1873.

However, even though the reactionary forces had the upper hand during this decade, political developments nationally and internationally continued to develop in tandem. Socialists began promoting the need for political organisation and representation – heralded by the founding of the Social Democratic Workers' Party of Germany (SDAP), the precursor to German SPD, by Wilhelm Liebknecht and August Bebel in 1869 – they ensured that it was based on Marxist principles.

In Britain, the push for a new political party for the direct representation of labour didn't really gain ground until 1880, and it came from an unlikely source: Henry Mayers Hyndman, a wealthy financier. His intention was to launch a "really democratic party in opposition to the monstrous tyranny of Mr Gladstone... with the object of bringing about democratic changes in England".⁹

Both Marx and Engels were highly sceptical about Hyndman, particularly his marked hostility to trade unionism and strikes. They wrote: "When the [First] International was founded, we explicitly formulated the battle cry – the emancipation of the

working class must be brought about by the working class themselves. We cannot therefore associate ourselves with people who openly state that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves, and must be freed from above by philanthropic big bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois."¹⁰

In June 1881, Hyndman launched the Social Democratic Federation (SDF); his manifesto lifted two chapters from *Capital* but introduced numerous mistakes. Hyndman was no longer welcome at 41 Maitland Park Road. Although Eleanor herself joined the SDF in 1884, Engels refused to support Hyndman's venture. The SDF fought for universal suffrage, a legal eight-hour day for industrial workers and introduction of salaries for MPs to enable working class people to enter parliament.

The 1880s saw a sharpening of political debate in Britain, which led to a number of schisms, factions, splits and regrouping amongst the socialist movement. In 1884, the Fabian Society was founded, which openly opposed class struggle, revolution and any independent party of the working class. Instead its leaders Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Bernard Shaw, Hubert Bland and others, adopted the project of permeating the bourgeois parties, the Liberals and the Tories.

There was also a factional rift within the SDF between militant internationalists led by William Morris and Ernest Belfort Bax and the more nationalistic wing led by Hyndman. Hyndman drove Bax out of editing *Today*, a magazine of scientific socialism, and installed Henry Hyde Champion in his place.

In late 1884, the rift came to a head and 10 people, including William Morris, Eleanor, Edward Aveling and Robert Banner, handed in their resignations – and promptly founded the Socialist League. Their political allies in the split were anarchists. They produced *Commonweal*, a monthly newspaper, which in its first issue opposed British imperialism and the war in Sudan.

However, by the late 1880s, the Socialist League was deeply divided between those advocating political action and its opponents – who

were themselves split between those like William Morris, who felt that parliamentary campaigns represented inevitable compromises and corruptions, and an anarchist wing which opposed all electoral politics as a matter of principle.

Eleanor and Edward advanced the principle of participation in political campaigns, but were isolated in the party. At the Fourth Annual Conference of the Socialist League in 1888, the Bloomsbury branch, to which Eleanor and Edward belonged, moved that a meeting of all socialist bodies should be called to discuss the formation of a united organisation. This resolution was voted down by a substantial margin, as was another put forward by the same branch in support of contesting seats in both local and parliamentary elections.

The Socialist League then suspended the 80 members of the Bloomsbury branch on the grounds that the group had put up candidates jointly with the SDF, against the policy of the party. The Bloomsbury branch left the Socialist League and formed, if only briefly, the Bloomsbury Socialist Society.

Despite all the ructions in the national terrain, just five years later – and three days before Eleanor's 38th birthday – the British left held a conference in 1893 to form the Independent Labour Party and Keir Hardie was elected its first chairman. Eleanor attended as an observer, while Edward was a delegate. However, due to its constituent elements the ILP never moved closer to a Marxist party.

In 1897, both she and Edward re-joined the SDF.

The International

Political developments in Britain were influenced by changes in the international socialist landscape – which culminated in the creation of the Second International.

In 1886 Eleanor had helped organise the International Labour Conference in Paris. Later that year, she toured the US along with Edward and Liebknecht, raising money for the SPD.

In 1889 everything came together. It was a momentous year for two reasons: July was the centenary of the storming of the Bastille and it was the year of the Paris Exhibition to commemorate the revolution.

Two rival congresses were held in Paris that ultimately led to the founding of the Second International.

Eleanor realised the imperative of orchestrating a united congress and rallied the trade unions, as well as Hyndman, to push for a single congress.

She worked hard at the congress, translating many speeches including Clara Zetkin's on the question of female labour. The Congress passed a number of resolutions: eight hour day, disarmament

to challenge the capitalist arms industry and for an international labour demonstration on 1 May. Bernstein remarked that her effort was "superhuman".

But as the Second International developed, the old fight between the socialists and anarchists began to heat up again. At the Fourth Congress, held in London on 27 July 1896, the majority of delegates voted to exclude the anarchists.

The woman question

The specific role women played under capitalism was of great interest to Eleanor, and she developed a Marxist understanding of the woman question. In addition, she was very active in organising amongst women workers.

She also faced the every day struggle as a woman, torn between duty to the family and home, and her own independence. After her parents' deaths, she really came into her own as a political activist and organiser, no longer tethered by her role as daughter and carer.

She took as her starting point Engels' seminal work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*¹¹, published in 1884, which exposed the double burden of women in the home and workplace, the root of women's oppression under capitalism.

Eleanor was clear in her socialist analysis and in developing a solution to the women's question. A year after Bebel published *Women in the Past, Present, and Future*,¹² which was prohibited in Germany, she – together with Edward – wrote *The Woman Question: From a Socialist Point of View*,¹³ which includes this analysis:

"The first step [towards the emancipation of women] is the expropriation of all private property in land and in all other means of production. With this would happen the abolition of the state as it now is. No confusion as to our aims is more common than that which leads woolly thinking people to imagine that the changes we desire can be brought about, and the conditions subsequent upon them can exist, under a state regime such as that of today."

Although she fought for reforms, such as suffrage for women and the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, she didn't believe that these reforms in themselves would liberate women. "The actual position of women in respect to men would not be very vitally touched," they write in *The Woman Question*. They argued that it was only through the overthrow of capitalism and the reorganisation of society along socialist lines would women throw off their chains. "Without that larger social change women will never be free."

Her position bought her into conflict with other socialist peers, for example

Ernest Bax, whom she challenged to a debate. Bax was a terrible misogynist and argued that men were in fact the oppressed sex and were exploited by women. In an open letter, Eleanor wrote:

"I am, of course, as a socialist, not a representative of 'women's rights'. It is the sex question and its economic base that I propose to discuss with you. The so-called 'women's rights' question (which appears to be the only one you understand) is a bourgeois idea. I proposed to deal with the sex question from the point of view of the working class and the class struggle."¹⁴

Socialist or feminist?

Eleanor was very clear in her writings that she saw the working class as the only revolutionary force able to overthrow the capitalist system. In that sense, working class women, despite the sexism they faced on a daily basis from within their class, had more in common with working class men than they did with women from the privileged and exploiting classes.

Writing a report on the SPD's Gotha Conference in 1896, Eleanor summarises and supports Clara Zetkin's speech:

"Here comes the true struggle against man. Here the educated woman – the doctor, the clerk, the lawyer, is the antagonist of man. The women of this class are sick of their moral and intellectual subjugation. They are Noras rebelling against their doll's homes. They want to live their own lives, 'and economically and intellectually the demands of the middle-class women are fully justified'.

"Then comes the proletarian woman. She is drawn into the vortex of capitalist production because she is cheap to buy. But her position is not merely reactionary, it is also revolutionary.

"And that is why the working woman cannot be like the bourgeois woman who has to fight against the man of her own class. ...The objections of the bourgeois man to the rights of women are only a matter of competition... With the proletarian women, on the contrary, it is a struggle of the woman with the man of her own class against the capitalist class.

"Her end and aim are not the right of free competition with men, but to obtain the political power of the proletariat. Truly the workingwoman approves the demand of the middle-class women's movement... But only as means to the end that she may be fully armed for entering into the working-class struggle along with the man of her class."¹⁵

At this conference, Clara argued that systematic propaganda among working-women was "an absolute necessity for the proletarian movement".

Throughout the biography, Rachel Holmes attempts to frame Eleanor's theoretical work on women within a feminist

paradigm. She postulates that Eleanor was both a socialist and a feminist, equating capitalism and patriarchy as two competing systems of oppression.

Holmes argues that Eleanor saw women as “an economic and social class, globally oppressed. Working-class and middle class women were conjoined by the inseparability of production and the reproduction required to replenish the work force. From this perspective, patriarchy and capitalism were not just blood brothers but twins.”

Referring to the same quote above, she continues: “The necessity for women of all classes to work together, and for men and women to work together, were two of Eleanor’s key precepts”¹⁶, adding “Eleanor and Edward argue... women should be forming a united feminist front, challenging across class divisions the divide and rule that regulates production and reproduction.”¹⁷

However, that is not what Eleanor argued, neither in what she wrote above or in any of her writings on the woman question. She clearly maintained that the interests of working class women and working class men were not fundamentally opposed, and it was in best interests of both to unite to overthrow the bourgeois and petit bourgeois classes.

Holmes’ theoretical framework effectively leads her to differentiate between everything Eleanor did with the male working class, saying that is “socialist”, whereas when she was fighting against the subjugation of working class women that is solely within the realm of “feminism”. The logical conclusion of this analysis is that socialism doesn’t provide answers for working class women.

On the contrary, Eleanor was steadfast in her analysis that only with the overthrow of capitalism would women of all classes truly be free.

Her death

As a socialist, Eleanor dedicated her life to the class struggle. But that did not mean she gave that struggle a narrow trade union or economic interpretation. She recognised oppression in its many forms whether this was on grounds of gender, nation or ‘race’. Not only did she fight against sexism and for women’s liberation, but also the anti-Semitism that was rife within the British and international labour movement. She was a fiery speaker and inspired many of the next generation of socialist agitators, including Sylvia Pankhurst.

Tragically, Eleanor committed suicide by swallowing hydrogen cyanide, then called prussic acid, and died on 31 March 1898, at her home on Jew’s Walk in Sydenham, south London. Her desperate decision was taken after discovering that Edward had secretly married a young actress and bought a flat, while still draining her of most of the money bequeathed her by Engels. This came after he had blackmailed her half brother Freddy for years, as well as borrowing money from her friends and taking money from workers’ organisations.

Others had tried to warn her but she had resolutely defended Edward, believing these were politically-motivated slanders. The depths of deceit to which Edward had sunk and the shame she felt probably too proved much for her to bear.

But her terrible end should not blind us to her achievements. The tributes that poured in from all sides testify to this. Will Thorne, who she had helped so ably in the Gasworkers strike remembered her in 1925 when he wrote in his memoirs:

“But for this tragedy, I believe Eleanor would have still been living and would have been a greater women’s leader than the greatest of contemporary women.”¹⁸

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The Silvertown general strike

The lost story of a strike that shook London and helped launch the modern labour movement

BOOK REVIEW

Silvertown

John Tully, Monthly Review Press/Lawrence & Wishart, 2014
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John Tully tells well the story of courageous strikers at the Silver's rubber and electrical factory in the east end of London in late 1889. The three-month strike ended in defeat, signifying a setback for the wave of New Union victories in Britain, writes Joy Macready

THE FOREWORD TO historian John Tully's book *Silvertown* is written by John Callow, political education and research officer of the General, Municipal and Boilermakers' Union (GMB). The GMB's history is linked to Will Thorne's National Union of Gasworkers & General Labourers (NUG&GL), which was instrumental in the development of New Unionism in Britain in the 1880s and 90s, and played a fundamental role in unionising the Silvertown workers.

Callow, referring to the origins of the GMB, writes: "The union, like the solidarity of its members who fought so valiantly on the streets of London's East End, was founded on a big idea. It sought to represent the underdog, the unskilled worker, and to unequivocally and unapologetically represent class as opposed to sectional interest.

"It was serious about redistributing power and wealth from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'; appreciative of the risks it ran and the destruction of earlier general unions; and driven by a clearly articulated Marxist vision that found its expression in the guiding objective of the union's first rule book."¹

Its predecessor, the NUG&GL, was formed during the New Unionism movement that swept through factories across the country like wildfire in the late 1880s. Before this development, only skilled workers – or labour "aristocrats" – were organised in old-style craft unions, and their members fought hard to keep out the unskilled or semi-skilled workers, such as dockers, gasworkers and general labourers.

During 1888 and 1889, previously unorganised workers formed unions, took militant strike action – and won their demands. The strike wave began with the matchwomen's strike in July 1888, when 1,500 women walked out at the Bryant & May match factory. They organised pickets and raised strike funds, as well as forming their own union, the Union of Women Matchmakers.

This strike was followed in March, when gasworkers from the Beckton Gas Works in the East End of London joined a protest rally – and won their demand for an eight-hour day. On the back of that, thousands got together to form the NUG&GL.

Then the dockers walked off the job in August that year. The Great Dock Strike involved more than 130,000 strikers and established strong trade unions amongst London dockers. It was even more impressive that these workers collectivised, as the bosses effectively encouraged them to fight each other every morning to get work for the day. The strike lasted just four weeks – and the dockers won their demands, primarily an increase in pay to sixpence per hour, which became known as the "dockers' tanner".

The dockworkers also demanded an increase in the overtime rate, in addition to the abolition of the contract system and 'plus' payments, which were a sort of bonus paid for work done quickly and calculated according to the amount of goods the dockers moved. Furthermore, the dockers insisted that men should be hired for at least four hours per day and that the 'call-on' should occur only twice a day.

Just as the dockers' strike finished, the workers at Silver's rubber and electrical factory, again in the East End of London docklands, struck – their primary demand was that workers should be entitled to overtime pay for weekly shifts exceeding 80 hours.

However, by this time, as Tully demonstrates, both the bosses and the state were better prepared. And there was an overriding political imperative – they had to stem the tide of New Unionism before workers across all industries took up the fight for decent wages and conditions.

Silver's board of directors, with the full backing of the state apparatus – the police and law courts, dug in their heels and successfully set out to starve the strikers back to work.

As well as the role the bosses and the state played, Tully exposes the treacherous role the old craft unions, particularly the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), played in undermining the strikes, whether by dragging their feet in raising strike funds, or outright obstruction by refusing time and again to call out ASE members, an action which would have made it impossible for Silver's factory to continue to operate and would have ensured the strikers' victory.



Silvertown, East End of London

The weakness of Tully's analysis is that does not advance a way that the strikers could overcome the ASE and London Trades Council (LTC) leaders' sectional mentality by going directly to the members and creating cross-union committees to challenge their own leaders apathy and shut down Silver's.

Conditions in Silvertown

Silvertown, named after Samuel Winkworth Silver's rubber factory, was in midst of the East End of London where, according to social reformer Charles Booth, 35 per cent of workers were destitute. Tully writes that Silvertown was "a place apart", which "had – and in some respect still has – an air of isolation, strangeness and remoteness"².

The workers' houses occupied a central strip, close to the factories and wedged between the dock on one side and the marsh and river. The rent in that area was much higher than in other parts of London, despite being markedly substandard housing. The rent was much too high for casual labourers, so overcrowding was widespread.

Many of Silvertown's residents were casual labourers, who picked up work on a daily basis at the dock or factory gate. The lives of Silvertown labourers were blighted by chronic destitution and systemic violence. There were many deaths from infectious diseases, may due directly to polluted water supplies, exacerbated by overcrowding, overwork and malnutrition.

Workers at Silver's also faced dangerous conditions, including chemicals such as molten sulphur, sulphur dioxide and hydrogen sulphide. They were exposed to carcinogens, such as naphtha, benzene and carbon disulphide, and worked in incredibly high temperatures.

As a result, the average lifespan of a Silvertown worker was 35 years, compared to an average of almost 42 years across Britain.

The great strike

The strike at the India-Rubber, Gutta-Percha & Telegraph Works (Silver's) started on 11 September, 1889. Gutta percha was made from the latex of a tree- harvested in Malaya; which had excellent insulation properties for electric cables, especially in underwater conditions. The firm's ships were girdling the ocean beds with a network of telegraph cables. Thus the factory was working flat out for a booming industry responding to a growing demand for and all sorts of electrical equipment and rubber goods.

"The submarine cables were of immense geopolitical significance, in particular for the administration of the European colonial empires," according to Tully³. As a result, in the 1880s Silver's had developed into one of the world's premier rubber, electrical and telegraph firms.

Silver's employed 3,000 labourers and artisans, with casual workers taken on during peak periods. Most workers put in a 12-hour day, from 6am to 6pm, but many had to put in overtime, working 70-80 hours per week.

At the time the strike started, the dockers were still out on strike. The police had kept a low profile on the docks until early September, in response to frantic lobbying of Scotland Yard by the dock companies. This response was to foreshadow their heavy presence during the Silvertown strike.

On Wednesday 11 September, 280 yardsmen submitted to management a written petition for a pay rise and an undercover lunchroom, as they were forced to eat outside in all seasons. Yardsmen were unskilled and semiskilled men, labourers employed to carry machine parts, cables, rubber, copper and other raw materials around the yard and wharves outside the factor buildings; they also shovelled coal, swept up rubbish, manoeuvred heavy loads; and filled and emptied carts and railway wagons.

Initially, Silver's managing director, Matthew Gray, granted the three farthings increase for the yardsmen. This news spread like wildfire over the

weekend, resulting in many of the non-unionised, non-craft workforce, including electrical shop workers, signing a round robin asking for the same increase. From this time on, Gray was intransigent; he would neither negotiate directly with the strikers nor accept outside offers of arbitration, e.g. from the NUG&GL.

On Monday 16 September, a notice appeared on the factory gates stating the company was withdrawing its offer to the yardsmen and flatly rejecting the electrical shop workers' demands.

The 280 yardsmen walked out, followed by 700 or 800 workers from other sections of factory soon after. Trying to instil fear into the rest of the workforce, Gray summoned the employees to tell them there would be no increase. By Thursday afternoon, the works were altogether closed with 2,000 men thrown out of work. The strikers, no doubt, took heart from the dock victory that ended at the end of that week.

Impressively, many women workers also came out on strike. The company employed 350 women and girls, which was about 11 per cent of the workforce. They had the worst pay rates, even for identical work. In addition, they were not paid if there was no work, but had to remain on the job without pay and sacked if they went home.

As Tully says: "From the capitalist's view of view, patriarchy was a great boon: employing women on substandard rates helped depress wages and boost profits."⁴

Eleanor Marx, daughter of Karl, was heavily involved in the Silvertown strike, particularly amongst women workers. Tully wrongly attributes her success as making "feminist"⁵ history, when in fact she was making socialist history – organising women along class lines. At a time when women were banned from voting, university education and joining the old craft unions, Eleanor (as she was commonly known) organised the first women's branch of the NUG&GL and became the founding secretary.

Eleanor appealed strongly to the women. She argued that they "must form unions and work in harmony with the men's trade unions. As the dock strike had taught them the lesson that skilled and unskilled labour should work together, so the present strike should teach them a further great lesson. That they could only win by men and women working in combination. The capitalist was only using women to underwork men and that would be the case until women refused to undersell their brothers and husbands," according to a report in the *Stratford Express* quoted by Tully.⁶

She also served on the national committee of the NUG&GL. In addition, she volunteered her services to the movement, for example teaching leader Will Thorne to read and write.

As well as the small three farthing wage increase, the demands of the strikers included: proportionate increases for piecework, and for women, girls and boys in all departments; overtime pay for work after 5pm at time and a quarter, and work on Sundays and holidays to be paid double time.

The workers further demanded the abolition of the hated rule refusing payment for time worked to anyone omitting to put in a ticket at the start of

the day. Lastly, they stipulated that they would only return to work on the basis of no victimisation of strike activists.

From the outset, the workers set up a 30-strong strike committee, set up daily picket lines to stop scabs from going in, organised mass meetings and demonstrations, fundraised, made flags and banners, and called on their working class brothers and sisters for assistance.

By the time the New Unionist Will Thorne and others arrived, Frederick Ling, a stoker at Silvertown, and his comrades had already had the strike well organised, educated by the dock strike. However, the bosses had also learned lessons from the preceding victorious struggles.

The bosses' offensive

There was no question whether the company could afford to give the workers a pay raise. Silver's factory was making huge profits for the company's shareholders at the employees' expense. The counteroffensive by the bosses was about something much bigger.

As Tully writes: "A workers' victory at Silvertown would set an example for the working class as a whole and would increase the power of the New Unions; in this respect, both the strikers and Silver's were proxies for a broader class struggle. There can be little doubt that Silver's could have well afforded to grant the modest demands of the strikers. The ruling class had demanded a line in the sand and Gray's hand wielded the stick that drew it."⁷

Political heavyweights, like Tory Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, had a direct conduit with members of the board of directors at Silver's. For example, one board member Henry Marcham's brother was the government whip in the House of Lords. Salisbury associated with figures such as William Collison, who headed up the strikebreaking National Free Labour Association, and even the Kelly-Peters Gang and the "Eyeball Busters", East End criminal elements who specialised in roughing up trade unionists.

There were even priests among the shareholders of Silver's – who completely ignored the strikers during the dispute.

And Silver's held the line against New Unionism. By this point, employers were ready to launch a counteroffensive against New Unions using the methods pioneered at Silver's.

Tully links the strikebreaking methods employed at Silvertown to those used in the US during the 1930s. At that time, many employers adopted a "scientific" strikebreaking package, which became known as the "Mohawk Valley Formula". The formula was based on the methods adopted by the Remington Rand Corporation to crush a big strike at Ilion, New York plant.

Tully argues that this was the earlier version – "the Silvertown Formula". He writes: "The individual elements of both 'formulae' were not original, but in both cases they were combined into a formidable strikebreaking package. The central elements of the Silvertown formula included the refusal of all offers of arbitration or negotiation, and the transfer of work overseas or its 'outsourcing' to other local factories.

"The firm also attempted to mobilise middle-class opinion against the strikers via the press, in particular by blaming the dispute on the outside agitators.

"Silver's was also able to rely on the cooperation of the police, who used heavy-handed methods against the strikers. The police were also used to escort large numbers of scabs, who had been recruited in rural districts, through picket lines.

"Another innovation was the housing and feeding of the blacklegs inside the factory. Finally, the company had the full use of the Metropolitan Police and Home Office solicitors to prosecute strikers."⁸

Gray forged this strikebreaking methodology. He dug in, refused to negotiate and had the machinery dismantled and shipped to the company's smaller factory, Persan Works, near Paris. Silver's also outsourced work to other London engineering and electrical firms. Gray took the opportunity to remove old machinery and install new equipment, effectively upgrading the factory during the strike.

Silver's also actively recruited blacklegs, then called "scab herding", from outside the East End. They put an advertisement in a local paper for 60 labourers near Colchester – and with high unemployment in the rural area, 250 turned up in response. However, many turned down the work when they realised they would be scabbing.

The police played a critical role in breaking the strike. Not only did they accompany the scabs from Colchester via train – and in first class, no less – to keep them away from the strikers, but also escorted them right to the factory gates via steam launch. The blacklegs were billeted aboard the company cable ship, tied up at the Thames Wharf inside the factory grounds.

The pickets hooting and jeering had deterred many would-be blacklegs; some repented and had train fares home paid by strike committee. However, on the 50th day of strike, 5 November, strikers turned out in force for their picket to be confronted by a thick line of Metropolitan police escorting blacklegs into the factory. From then on, the police had a constant presence on the streets of Silvertown.

Gray and his political allies also used the law courts to punish strikers and criminalise picketing, even though it was legal. On 8 November, the West Ham magistrates' court found a number of strikers guilty of intimidation and fined them hefty amounts, while other strikers were bound over to keep the peace.

The violence meted out by the police quickly escalated. On 19 November, the police harassed a demonstration and picketers started throwing stones. The police retaliated with a baton charge, resulting in serious injuries and with many strikers being taken to hospital. The next day, mounted police charged another demonstration.

Lastly, at the beginning of November, Silver's threatened to evict strikers from their homes – which were owned by the company. Faced with losing their homes as well as being starved forced many workers to abandon the strike and return to work.



Dockers waiting for the “call-on”, Isle of Dogs

Working class solidarity

During the 12 week strike, the Silvertown workers received much support from their local community, socialist organisations such as the Social Democratic Federation, and other unions and charitable organisations. They went door-to-door in working class neighbourhoods collecting strike funds – some strikers actually wore out their shoes because they pounded the pavement so often.

Local traders reportedly denounced the 70 Colchester men who were billeted aboard the cable ship and refused to supply them with meat and foodstuffs. The company was forced to drive some bullocks and sheep into the works to provide for the scabs.

Amongst the strikers, there was real-world working class solidarity. Some report that half-starved single girls gave their strike pay to married workmates so their children might be fed.

However, the mass support and large financial contributions that had flooded in for the Great Dockers' Strike didn't materialise for the Silvertown strikers. For example, the dockers had received £30,000 from the Australian dockers alone, which had helped the strike continue to victory.

This was partly due to the media war being waged against the strikers by the bourgeois press. To counter this propaganda, Eleanor Marx called on the workers' movement to unite to launch a labour press.

However, the bigger cause was a lack of solidarity from within the factory itself.

The main aim of the strike was to close the coal shop, essential for raising steam for the boilers and machinery. Turners and smiths, members of Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), struck with the labourers. However, the fitters, carpenters and instrument makers, also members of the ASE, remained on the job.

Thereby the Silvertown strike was undermined from the outset by a lack of unity between skilled tradesmen and so-called unskilled labourers. The leaders of the ASE, an “old” or craft union, refused to call out its Silvertown members in solidarity with the New Union, the NUG&GL.

Addressing a strike committee meeting, ASE member Tom

Mann said that the strike had exposed the huge problem of the lack of working class unity. Encouraged by their own union leaders, the engineers and tradesmen at Silver's had refused to join the stoppage, and money for the strike fund was not coming in quickly enough. What was necessary, Mann argued, was to “hasten on a Federation of the Trades” capable of tackling the employers as a solid front.

Tragically, the ASE, protecting its own sectional interests, hid behind a technicality – that its members were only “doing their jobs”, and would on principal refuse to do a labourer's job. However, the NUG&GL claimed that fitters were helping to dismantle machinery sent to Persan factory. The ASE denied this, saying that its members were only working on light machinery that could be removed and installed without labourer assistance. However, to the Silvertown strikers, the craftsmen that remained on the job were no better than blacklegs who were prolonging the dispute.

The strikers believed – and rightly – that if the ASE men were to strike, it would force Silver's to negotiate to end the stoppage; while the ASE said withdrawal would have little impact and jeopardise their own jobs, which could be taken by non-unionists.

As Mann argued: “It was undoubtedly true that, by enabling the firm to run machinery, they were prolonging the strike.”⁹ Had machinery broken down and not been repaired, it would have been difficult for the scab machine minders to maintain production.

But the ASE went even further and started to witch-hunt its own members. Police arrested Hugh Walsh, an ASE member from Canning Town, plus another when they went to Silvertown – and the chief witnesses were two other ASE members!

The London Trades Council, a sluggish body of respectable craft unionists headed by George Shipton, from the Painters' Union, was equally uncooperative, for similar sectional and economic reasons as the ASE. Afraid of the New Unions and their explosive growth, Shipton dismissed them as “mushroom societies likely to die an early death”.

The LTC offered to mediate in the strike, but took no action



Dockers' demonstration, September 1889

when Gray outrightly rebuffed the proposal.

Under Shipton, the LTC had even fobbed off the dockers when they asked for help. Although Ben Tillett, the leader of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union, had written the council for assistance, Shipton asserted that it was "impossible to interfere in the dock strike without the consent of the strike leaders". He was equally impenetrable to the Silvertown strikers.

The strikers also launched international appeals, particularly to the Persan factory workers in France. In the fourth week of the strike, with funds low, the strike committee sent Edward Aveling, common law husband of Eleanor Marx's, to act as emissary. However, on 16 October Edward returned with bad news: the workers at Silvers French plant had refused his appeal for working class solidarity. This drives home the importance of organising across borders to develop international solidarity.

Crushing defeat

On 9 December, after a number of workers were forced back to work through either the threat of losing their homes or by sheer starvation, a general meeting of the strikers recognised the inevitable and declared strike officially over. Out of 3,000, only 450 were still on strike.

The Great Silvertown Strike had been crushed and the New Union upsurge temporarily halted.

As Tully writes: "Using the methods tested at Silvertown, the employers were to launch a decade-long offensive against the unions that fully merits the description of class war waged under the banner of 'freedom of contract'."¹⁰

Much of what came later was a refinement of the "Silvertown Formula", including no negotiation, no union recognition, no outside arbitration, mass enrolment of scabs from rural areas, billeting scabs inside factory or other worksite, and mobilising large number of police – and later soldiers and gunboats – to protect them.

Employers continued to use the courts to punish strikers and criminalise picketing, and in 1901 a law was brought in, called the Taff Vale judgement, where employers could sue trade unions for damages resulting from strike action.

This impelled many trade unionists to look beyond trade unionism toward independent working class political action. As Will Thorne, who was also a member of the SDF, said in 1893: "During a strike there are no Tories and Liberals among the strikers, they are all workers. At election times there are no workers, only Tories and Liberals. During an election there are no Tory and Liberal capitalists, and all of them are friends of the workers. During a strike there are no Tories and no Liberals among the employers. They are all capitalists and enemies of the workers."

It was clear that workers needed an independent voice in parliament in order to override such decisions Taff Vale and implement reforms that syndicalism alone could not win. In 1900, the labour and socialist movements came together to form the Labour Representation Committee (LRC).

Lessons learned

The biggest strategic problem facing the Silvertown workers was to break the stronghold of the old craft unions' leaders.

Although Tully reports the many times the strike committee sent representatives to the LTC meetings and appealed to the Executive Committee of the ASE to call out its members, he doesn't discuss how the strikers reached out to other union members, particularly those on site. This sectionalist mentality is still very much prevalent in today's trade union movement. There is a tacit agreement of "non-interference" in another union's business, something that has ensured that a number of great strikes have ended in defeat.

The Silvertown strikers should have gone immediately to the ASE members and have them represented on a cross-union strike committee. They should have had a unionisation drive and pulled in the 50 per cent of workers, mainly electricians, that the ASE would not allow in as members. They should have sent delegations to all the local union meetings to demand assistance and build support groups.

These cross-union bodies could have helped break down the undemocratic nature of the craft unions and opened up new layers of workers to New Unionism. They could also have developed

into councils of action across the whole country, challenging the bosses' rule and ousting the bourgeois political parties.

For what these workers didn't lack was determination and courage. As Tully writes, "The men and women at the rubber and telegraph works had played a tremendous role...For 12 long weeks, 3,000 previously unorganised Silvertown workers and their families picketed, marched, sang, laughed and suffered terribly through a protracted dispute."¹¹ However, what they needed was a revolutionary socialist strategy for transforming the old unions and a party fighting for political power.

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This issue of *Fifth International* appears in a period of rising great power rivalry. From Iraq to Ukraine the imperialist blocs are competing to retain and redivide their share in exploiting the world's people and resources. This journal warns of the dangers lodged within the present situation and to help prepare an anti-imperialist, antiwar movement that is not afraid to point to our own ruling class as the main focus of our opposition



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